DEATH OVER SAKHALIN: THE DESTRUCTION OF KAL 007

At ten thousand metres above the inky black sea, the sky was thick with scudding clouds, which drowned out the waning moon and blocked out the stars.

In his cramped cockpit, the Soviet fighter pilot bent over the glowing green tube of his radar screen, peering alternately at the readout on it and then up through his cockpit canopy, at the distant, half-seen speck that was his quarry. It was the second time that night that it had entered his country's airspace, and this time he had taken off specifically to locate and intercept it; and, once he had found it, to discover just what it was and what it was doing.

The Soviet pilot had no more time left. He was flying over some of the most sensitive military sites on his nation's territory, sites that were spied on virtually round the clock by enemy planes and ships lurking just offshore. The enemy, under a bellicose and militarily illiterate leader, had in recent days also begun a major military build-up, one which might easily presage an invasion. And now, there was this intrusion, which could easily be an enemy spy plane peering down on the defences...or even, conceivably, a nuclear-armed bomber on a mission of annihilation.

The pilot had tried to contact the quarry. He had signalled it on radio, at international frequencies, with no reply. He had flashed his aeroplane's lights at it, also with no response whatever. Then, as a last ditch manoeuvre, he'd fired his cannons past it, the shells streaking through the night. Still nothing.

There was, the pilot concluded, only one course of action remaining to him, before the quarry passed back into international airspace with whatever information it might have gathered. His orders, passed on from ground control via radio, were clear. Since he could not get the plane to respond to his signals or to compel it to land, he had to shoot it down.

"Now I will try rockets," he announced, and pressed the button on his control column. From under his wings, two anti-aircraft missiles streaked away, one after the other; the first, armed with an infra-red warhead homing on the target's engine heat, the second locking on its radar reflection. Two seconds after launch, there was a huge explosion.

"The target is destroyed," the Soviet pilot said as he flew on through the darkness. There was nothing more to see.

It was an hour before dawn on 1st September 1983, and a mystery was just beginning.

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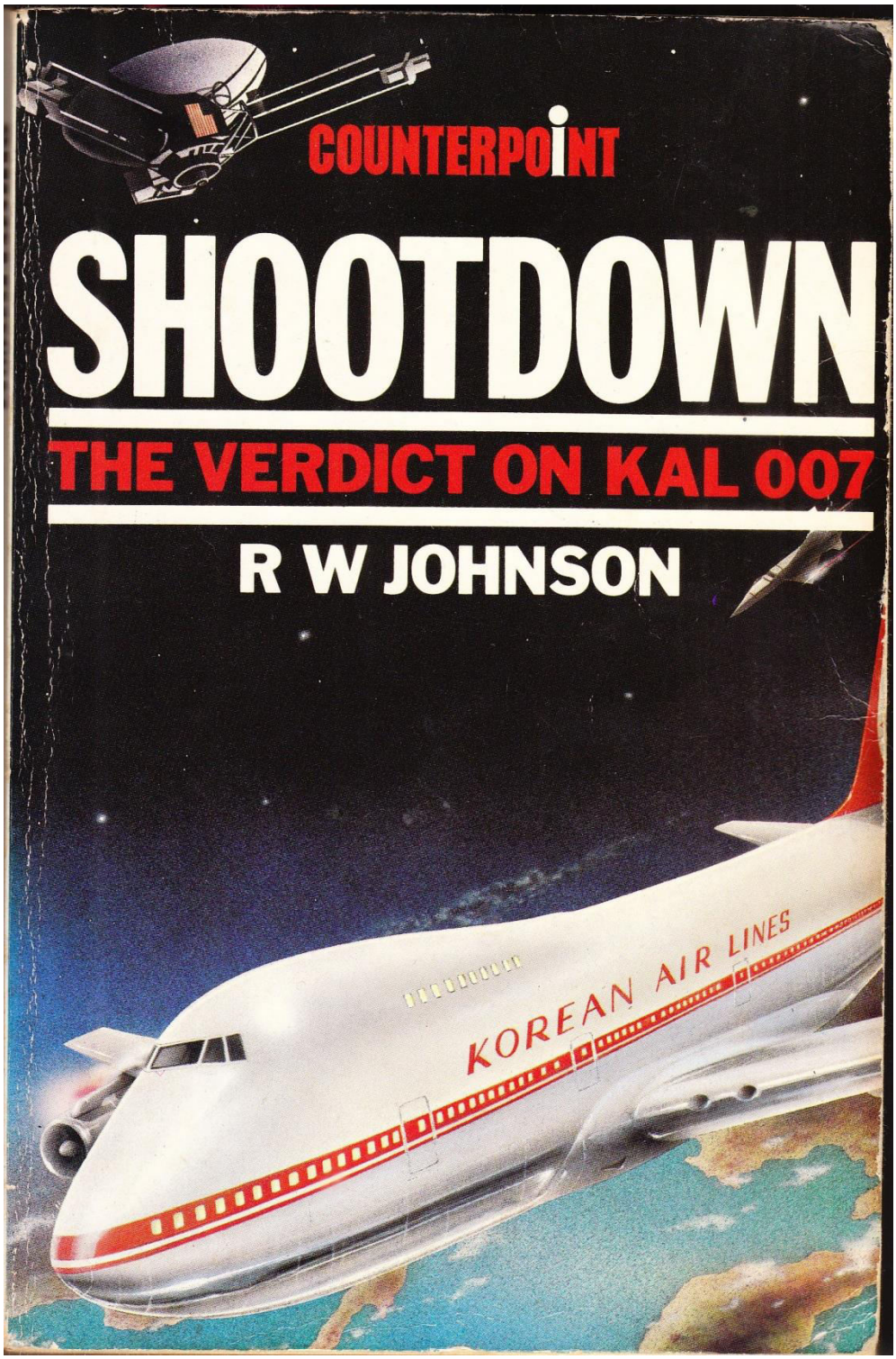
Sources

In the course of this article, I will rely on the following sources:

Books:

Shootdown: The Verdict on KAL 007 by RW Johnson, Unwin Paperbacks, 1986, hereafter referred to as *Johnson*. Much of this article is based on information presented in this book and it is partly a review of it. By and large, unless specifically mentioned otherwise, all information cited in this article comes from Johnson; his book provides an extensive bibliography at the end which cites *his* sources.



The Target Is Destroyed: What Really Happened to Flight 007 by Seymour Hersh, Random House, 1986, hereafter referred to as *Hersh*. For reasons which will become apparent, this book can be safely largely

disregarded as a serious source. I will, however, refer to it when pointing out why its conclusions can and should be rejected.

The Truth Behind KAL Flight 007 by Akio Takahashi, Ningan-sha Publishers, 1984, hereafter referred to as *Takahashi*. I will be using this book as a secondary source, citing information it provides about the background of the episode in question. Indeed, since Takahashi's book came out two years *before* the previous two, it's mildly surprising why they did not cite it, even if only to refute what it said.

KAL Flight 007: The Hidden Story by Oliver Clubb, hereafter referred to as *Clubb*, of which I confess that I have only read extracts and reviews. It would appear that Clubb in substance agrees with the conclusions reached by Johnson. There are a couple of things he adds which I will cite as and when relevant.

Links:

For all other information I have used sources available online. I will be indicating them as [n] and providing the source link at the end of this article.

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Part 1: Introduction and Background

Those who grew up after (what was claimed to be) the end of the Cold War can barely imagine what it was like. The two superpowers faced each other across frontiers bristling with weapons, while missile-carrying submarines lurked off each other's shores and long-range ballistic missiles in underground silos were served round the clock by crews waiting for the orders to press the button that would send them hurtling upwards on their way, to come screaming down on at many times the speed of sound on cities halfway round the world. And all across Africa, Asia and South America, they fought proxy wars, where peasant guerrillas and right wing death squads vied for control of desperately impoverished nations, which in most cases ended up more impoverished still.

All this was carried out while the two opposing camps, incidentally, were theoretically at peace with each other, and in fact were superficially friendly. At times, indeed, when the rivalry threatened to get seriously out of hand, they even got together to talk about limiting their weapons and cooling off their arms race; but, each time this happened, domestic political compulsions on the "democratic" side meant that

politicians had to look “tough” to appease their domestic constituencies, and the Great Game was on again.

Overwhelmingly, the fault for the recurring cycle of tensions lay with the United States. The USSR could neither match it in expenditure, nor really wanted to. Even after the Second World War, despite all the rhetoric from the West about Soviet expansionism, by and large the USSR left Communist movements elsewhere in the world to sink or swim. The Chinese and Cuban revolutions, for example, owed little or nothing to Soviet aid – any Russian help came afterwards, and in all probability Moscow would have been more than happy with the status quo as long as it wasn’t turned into an opportunity to threaten their country. It wasn’t the *USSR* which was opposed to peace with a halt to the arms race. It would have been very happy with that, because it did not make gargantuan profits from armament sales and would have been content to spend that amount on other things altogether. Throughout the Cold War, Soviet policy was reactive, not proactive. American policy involved – as it does today in the case of Russia – trying to force the USSR to react and then blaming it for reacting.

By the late 1970s, though, it was looking as though the Cold War had run out of steam. The Vietnam War was over. Africa was mostly decolonised. Nobody was threatening to invade Cuba. There were no longer any major contentious points on which the two superpowers could come to blows. Peace might be a real thing, almost round the corner.

And so it might have been, but for Jimmy Carter.

I have written elsewhere[1] about how Jimmy Carter, as President, signed the order authorising aid to jihadist fundamentalists trying to destabilise the socialist government of Afghanistan, in the knowledge that this would almost certainly trigger a Soviet intervention. Once that intervention happened, Carter professed outrage, declared it an “invasion”, and led his nation’s vassals, slaves and hangers-on into a boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Not surprisingly, then, anyone succeeding him would have to be even harsher against the USSR, if only to avoid accusations of being a wimp or weakling. But the person succeeding Carter was not just anyone; it was an extraordinary combination of Hollywood hubris, intellectual vacuity, and rabid right wing jingoism called Ronald Reagan.

This is not the place to go into a detailed description of the Reagan regime; in any case, not being one of his nation’s citizens, it is not my place to discuss his domestic activities. It is, however, important to note that his primary concern in appointing his secretaries and advisors was not competence or knowledge; the only criterion Reagan recognised was their loyalty to himself. Once they were appointed, they could pretty much do as they wanted, and as long as they told Reagan just what he wanted to hear, he signed what they told him to.

This might not have mattered too much in foreign policy, if Reagan had adopted a pacifist line. But, as I said, after Carter’s anti-Soviet provocations had raised the temperature, there was no way Reagan could

back down even had he wanted to. Of course, there is also absolutely no indication that he wanted to. Reagan was not just a jingoist to the bone, he was such a military illiterate that on one occasion he claimed that submarine launched missiles were “less dangerous” than land-based ones because they could be “recalled in flight”. On another occasion he said that the SS19 was the USSR’s “largest missile”. When corrected that it was the SS18 which was the largest, he immediately said that it was just like the perfidious Russians to switch the numbers round in order to fool the West. It had to be explained to him that SS18 and 19 were NATO designations and had nothing to do with what the USSR actually called them.

When military illiteracy at this level is allied to extreme jingoism and far right wing zealotry, facts cease to matter. The world is what it is because the perception is that it is so, not because it is really so. Military adventures that any sane person would correctly decide would be suicidal not only appear possible, they become almost divine writ, and anyone who attempts to talk sense might as well save his breath.

It was not, however, as though Reagan was surrounded by people eager to talk sense. I have mentioned his penchant for surrounding himself with cronies whose only qualification was personal loyalty. William Clark, his National Security Advisor, was one of Reagan’s old cronies from California, whom the President had – as governor of the state – made a judge despite his having no law degree. Once Reagan moved into the White House, he brought Clark along with him. Clark cheerfully admitted that he knew nothing whatsoever of foreign policy, but then he didn’t need to; he had what was really needed, an ability not only to know what Reagan might think on a certain topic, but to know what Reagan would think before he had actually got around to thinking it.

A second *éminence grise* was William Casey, the head of the CIA. Another extreme right winger who was also corrupt to the bone, Casey oversaw a massive expansion of the CIA, which at that time had yet to recover from the Watergate scandal. Casey pushed for more CIA control over everything, hugely increased “covert operations” – in other words, assassinations, arming of terrorists, and arranging what we would today call “colour revolutions”. CIA agents (and agent provocateurs) were everywhere. As much as possible in those days before the Internet and mobile telephony, everything they could spy on, they did.

One of the new military doctrines espoused by Reagan, or, rather, by Reagan’s advisors/controllers was announced by his Defense (*sic*) Secretary, one Caspar Weinberger, in May 1981. It was called “horizontal escalation”. The idea was that if the USSR – or anyone who America declared to be a proxy for the USSR – attacked American “interests” at any point, the US would retaliate by “attacking the aggressor’s weak points wherever we find them.” Of course, what the term “American interests” meant was left undefined; it would mean whatever the US government decided it meant. The idea was that if anyone – it could be a Communist guerrilla movement, or Libya, which at that time was already firmly in Washington’s crosshairs – was blamed for striking not just at America but at an American ally/vassal, the US would retaliate by attacking any real or alleged pro-Soviet nation or movement, even if it was on the opposite side of the globe and had nothing to do with the matter at all.

If this sounds like insanity, well, there's little to no difference between that and what the current American administration run by the blood-soaked war criminal Barack Hussein Obama is carrying out even as I write this[2]; provoking Russia in Ukraine, and then, as that endeavour begins to collapse, shifting the provocation to Syria – and when *that* is countered, almost certainly already preparing to provoke Russia somewhere else again.

It was Cold War then, but, as now, always on the simmering brink of turning hot.

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Part 2: The Radar War

I have said that Reagan set out to increase tensions with the Soviet Union, partly by an aggressive new military posture. Part of this new military posture included direct threats to the Soviet Union's territory itself. Now, by the early 1980s, this was possible only in one place. East Europe was then part of the Warsaw Treaty – the so-called "Warsaw Pact", and very heavily defended by Soviet and Allied forces. Iran, for decades a pliant American vassal, had been lost to it since Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution, so the southern border was similarly no longer accessible. The frozen wastes of the Arctic were a difficult barrier to ships and very far from Soviet population centres. So to the west, south and north Soviet territory was fairly inviolate. But the situation was very different along the Soviet Pacific coast, far to the east.

Here, geography had given America a huge strategic advantage. The Russian ports along the Siberian coast are ringed by an arc of islands, chief among which is the nation of Japan, then, as now, an American colony in all but name. Only a few outlets from the Sea of Okhotsk are available to the Russian (or, back then, Soviet) Navy – and all of those were, and are, easily monitored and if required could be blockaded by American (or Japanese puppet) forces. Further to the south was another US puppet, South Korea, and the US had – and has – nuclear armed forces stationed in both these "countries" in addition to its own bases in the Aleutians, Guam and further south in the Philippines. [That Japan and South Korea are only nominally independent of the US will become important later in this narrative; I'm not just throwing it in to annoy anyone.]

The Soviet Union's problems were exacerbated by several other factors. One was that these far-flung eastern reaches of the nation were very remote from the main population centres in eastern Europe and central Asia; they lay at the end of very long rail and air links over inhospitable territory, almost totally isolated during the long winter months. Besides, to the south lay China; back in the 1980s, the friendship between the People's Republic and Russia was a distant memory and the two countries' current de facto alliance was not even a blip on the horizon. The USSR had to station forces all along the immensely long border to guard against any Chinese attempt to thrust into Siberia, which would amputate the entire Pacific coast territory by cutting off road and rail links. And on top of all this, the Soviet military,

qualitatively and quantitatively, was far inferior to the forces its Western enemies could bring to bear against it in this sector. This was most overwhelming in the naval field, where American carrier groups alone virtually outnumbered and outgunned the entire Soviet fleet put together, but extended to all other forces as well. As will be seen, even the USSR's air defences here were left to planes which were, by the standards of the European sector, already obsolete.

How did the Americans provoke the USSR in this sector? As I said, the Sea of Okhotsk is easily blockaded and isolated. The American and Japanese (puppet) navies ran exercises just off the Soviet coast to drive home the point that they could impose such a blockade whenever they wished. The Soviet Navy's assets, bottled up in port, could be then annihilated as surely as the Imperial Russian Navy's Pacific Fleet was bottled up and destroyed in Port Arthur in 1905 shortly before the Battle of Tsushima[3]. They also ran exercises simulating actual amphibious invasion of the Soviet Union's Far eastern territories, including Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. It's not at all inconceivable that the military ignoramus Reagan actually imagined that he could launch an invasion of the eastern USSR and provide Moscow with a fait accompli. Also, this was the early eighties, when the concept of a "limited" or "winnable" nuclear war had not yet been abandoned. Nuclear winter and the collapse of civilisation were, as yet, concepts that the general public had yet to hear of. Clubb says that

> "In August 1981, senior Reagan Administration officials had told the *New York Times* that it was the Administration's intention to acquire capabilities 'to fight nuclear wars that range from a limited strike to a protracted conflict to an all-out exchange'."

And – considering that, today, we can once again hear talk of how Russia could and should be "nuked" – it would seem that some people still believe that a nuclear war can be fought and won.

Obviously, none of these things were unknown to the USSR; and to the extent it could, it began beefing up its security in these far eastern reaches of the Asian continent. One very important defensive measure it undertook was a chain of radars stretching down the coast, meant to peer far out across the ocean and give advance warning of incoming US missiles or airstrikes that would presage war and invasion. Radars can be jammed and defeated, if one knows their position, strength and the frequencies at which they operate; and when radars are used, their positions, strength and frequencies become detectable. Therefore, the US attempted to compel the USSR to expose their radars' position, strengths and frequencies.

How was this done? The US already had, as I have said, a massive force structure opposite Russia in the North Pacific. These included land based radars and intelligence stations on US-owned islands, apart from bases on Japanese soil. Apart from this, there were also Japanese bases, which complemented the American surveillance effort. In addition, there were American electronic surveillance ships, which lurked just outside Soviet territorial waters, and spy satellites overhead. And in addition to *these*, Boeing RC 135 surveillance and electronic warfare planes kept flying up and down the coastline on a 24 hour basis, from bases in Alaska to refuelling stations in the Aleutians and Japan and then back again.

All this electronic coverage, of course, would have been wasted if the Soviets refused to turn their radars on. In fact, they used the radars as little as possible so as not to give their secrets away. In order to force them to turn the radars on, the RC135s conducted what were known as “tickling operations”: short-duration high-speed dashes into Soviet airspace, which would force the Soviets to turn additional radars on to locate the intruder; as soon as the radars had been turned on and the huge electronics suites on the RC135s had detected their signatures, the spy planes would rush back out into international airspace. Similarly, carrier based US Navy fighters overflew the Soviet Kuril islands on multiple occasions. It was a risky game of chicken, or would have been but for one fact: the USSR’s air defence along the North Pacific, as I said, was wholly antiquated. 1960s era SA2 and SA3 missiles, whose radar guidance could by the 1970s already be easily jammed, vainly attempted to take out the intruders; by 1983, over nine hundred of them had been launched without shooting down a single American plane.

Obviously, then, Soviet *surface to air missiles* were no threat to American spy aircraft whatever; but the same couldn’t be said of Soviet *fighter planes*. But, as I said, American spy coverage of the entire Soviet eastern territory was virtually total. They knew the positions of the Soviet airfields, monitored them continuously, and were aware, Johnson says, of every single Soviet take off and landing, military or civilian, even as it happened. Therefore, if fighters were scrambled against a spy plane on a “tickling” expedition, the plane could be warned off before the interceptors could get within range.

Also – this is not something which Johnson points out, though – as the USSR’s top quality fighters were concentrated in defence of the much more high-value population and industrial centres in East Europe and Central Asia, even the aeroplanes based in the Northern Pacific tended to be second-line. Instead of the highly potent MiG 25, for example, the airfields of Kamchatka and Sakhalin had to make do with the 1960s era Sukhoi 15 interceptor and the already almost obsolescent MiG 23. Both these aircraft will feature in the episode we are now about to discuss.

One reason for this parlous state of the USSR’s air defences was that said air defences were not under the Soviet Air Force, the VVS, but under a separate service entirely, the Air Defence Forces (PVO). The PVO had its own chain of command, its own bases, aeroplanes, radars and missile defences, and of course had to compete for resources with the other services, especially the VVS. When the likely theatre of major war was Europe, the natural tendency was to reinforce the VVS, which would be active there and which was already fighting in Afghanistan, not the PVO.

Now, from what I’ve written so far, the reader may get the impression that it was all rabid warmongering from the Western side. However, there were a lot of differences and divisions. One set of these divisions was between the US’ European “allies”, who in truth were no more than vassals, yet retained some more independence and spine than they do today. The European vassals were hardly enthused at the prospect of a nuclear war which, whatever else it did, was certain to turn their nations to radioactive ash. Reagan’s warmongering rhetoric – from the safety of the other side of the Atlantic – was not welcome to them. Nor was the US government’s plan to emplace Pershing and MX nuclear missiles on the European continent.

Obviously, these missiles would immediately become a prime target for a Soviet first strike, taking out everything around them.

The other division, rather surprisingly, was in the US itself. At the time the American economy had not yet been taken over completely by Big Business, and various farm and manufacturing lobbies did good business with the USSR. *They* didn't want increased tensions; they wanted increased trade. With elections coming up in 1984, there was considerable pressure on the Reagan Administration either to make peace or to have so good a reason *not* to make peace that the naysayers and dissidents could be bypassed.

It seemed, in fact, that there would be no excuse not to start a further round of arms control talks, which would, inevitably, involve the cancellation of plans for the deployment of the Pershing and MX missiles in Europe. This was not something which would make what Johnson calls the "superhawks" around Reagan happy, and they looked around for an excuse – any excuse, as long as it would scupper peace.

And in a satellite image, they thought they had found it.

Back then, the Soviet Union and the United States adhered to something called the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which looked to prevent nuclear war by limiting the defence measures each side could take against the nuclear arsenals of the other. This treaty would be unilaterally abrogated by George W Bush in 2002[3], when the Cold War was allegedly long over and the threat from the Russians ended with it, all without a whimper of protest from the American "liberal" establishment, which in any case was then vociferously helping build up the fake justification for the invasion of Iraq. But in 1983 it was still operative. One of the features of the ABM treaty was that each side could only defend one site in their respective countries with anti-ballistic radars and missiles. In the case of the USSR, the site it chose to so defend was Moscow. Now in July 1983 the US' surveillance satellites spotted a gigantic new Soviet radar array at Krasnoyarsk, deep inland from the Pacific. So huge was this radar array that it was as tall as a fifty-storey building, and not expected to be completed and fully operational till 1988. But what could it mean?

One thing it could *not* possibly be, it was clear from the outset, was an anti-ballistic missile radar. The reason was clear. The radar faced east, across the frozen tundra, while ballistic missiles would come from the north, over the Arctic and the North Pole. It was a phased-array radar, which could not swing around – something totally impossible for anything its size in any case – and could only monitor objects to the east. The USSR, when challenged, denied that it was a military radar at all and insisted that it was meant to track satellite and Soyuz launches from the Baikanour space station. But, of course, just because it was allegedly a space tracking radar didn't mean it couldn't be also used for military purposes. There was a good chance that it was meant to plug a gap in the chain of radar stations covering the Soviet eastern coast. It would certainly be something the US would want to find out, and, if possible, use as a casus belli to torpedo negotiations altogether.

Before we go on to the next part, let's review the situation on the eastern Soviet coast as of September 1983:

First, Russian naval and air strength there was hemmed in by geography and hopelessly outclassed by their opponents.

Second, these opponents were monitoring them 24 hours a day, both legally from international airspace and by deliberate incursions meant to provoke a hostile response.

Third, the USSR had every reason to imagine that the Reagan administration was actually planning a war and looking for a chance to provoke it.

Fourth, a new and mysterious radar had been detected which the US was looking to use as a casus belli to break off negotiations.

All right so far? Now we come to the saga of a Korean Boeing, which left Anchorage in Alaska on the night of 1st September, 1983, flying to Seoul in South Korea.

It never arrived.

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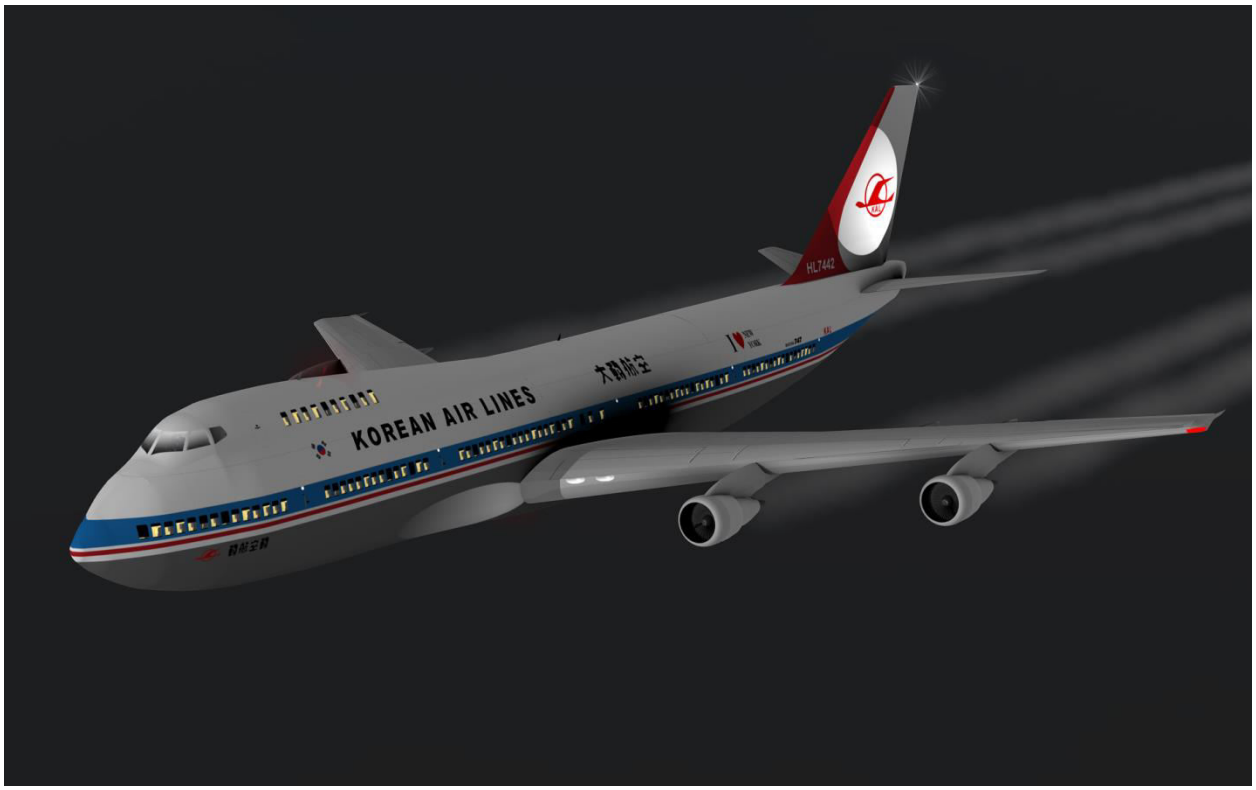
Part 3: The Final Journey of KAL 007

Section 1: Anchorage.

On 31st August 1983, a Korean Air Lines aeroplane departed from New York, en route to Anchorage in Alaska. From there it was scheduled to fly to Seoul in South Korea. The airliner was a Boeing 747 230B, for this particular journey numbered Flight 007. The official designation was KE 007, but it is almost universally known as KAL 007, so that is how it will be referred to henceforth.

Here's a rather fanciful picture of KAL 007 from Wikipedia:



KAL 007 arrived at Anchorage Airport seven and a half hours later, at 1130 Coordinated Universal Time, UTC, which used to be called Greenwich Mean Time – for convenience, all times Johnson refers to are in UTC, but since the scene of action was almost exactly on the other side of the planet, local times were about twelve hours different. It was supposed to take off again at 1220 – fifty minutes later – and during this time those passengers who wished to were permitted to go shopping in the airport terminal. The most prominent passenger was an ultraconservative and anti-Russian US Congressman, one Larry MacDonald, who chose to stay aboard the plane. As will be seen, this was an inadvertently important decision on his part.

From New York to Anchorage the plane had been flown by a crew under Captain Choi Tak Yong, which handed over to a fresh crew. Yong reported that his number two radio – the plane, of course, had several – had been noisy on the way up from New York and that his number two compass was giving trouble. The radio was checked by ground service mechanics and pronounced operational, while the compass was left to be fixed in Seoul since the Boeing not only had its Number One compass but four other independent navigational aids all working properly.

Until Anchorage, there was nothing particularly odd about KAL 007, except that it was carrying rather less than its full complement of passengers. A Boeing 747 in the usual international flight configuration carries about 350 passengers, but in this case was carrying just 240; it was therefore about a third empty.

Interestingly, however, though an average *fully loaded* 747 of the time (when the cockpit had three crew members, including a flight engineer, not two as now with more computerisation) had a full crew of sixteen to eighteen, as many as twenty cabin crew (air hostesses and stewards) were loaded, giving a total crew of 23. Johnson says there were, unknown to the passengers, two armed sky marshals on board, meant to deter hijackings. It isn't clear whether they numbered among these 23. But even assuming they did, and we discount them, there were at least three extra crew servicing a plane that was already a third empty of passengers.

But that wasn't quite enough. Six *more* KAL employees now boarded the plane, "deadheading" (flying as passengers) to Seoul. By some amazing coincidence, not one of them was a ground mechanic, an official, a booking clerk or an air hostess; *every single one of these six was a pilot or flight engineer*. I have not been able to determine how many of them were pilots and how many flight engineers, but the total adds up to the plane taking off with *three full complements* of cockpit crew members.

This was just the first of a remarkable series of remarkable coincidences, actually.

Let's take a moment to talk about the airline itself. Korean Air Lines (since renamed Korean Air) was from its inception very closely tied with the South Korean government, the CIA and the South Korean government's own spy agency, the Korean CIA (KCIA). Johnson and Takahashi give considerable details of KAL's very, very close relationship with both CIAs and the South Korean government as well as its American overlord. For instance, the US government allowed KAL to charge whatever fares it wanted for the trans Pacific route, a privilege denied even to American airlines. This meant that KAL could undercut the fares offered by everyone else, and make much greater profits than it otherwise would. One can readily imagine the sort of quid pro quo KAL offered in exchange. Its pilots, too, were largely drawn from the South Korean Air Force, so that they were not just trained in civilian aeroplane operations but in military tactics as well.

At this time, it ought to be mentioned, South Korea wasn't a "democracy" in any shape or form; it was a brutal and corrupt military dictatorship where generals-turned-presidents could kidnap political opponents from the other side of the world and personally shoot them in the cellars of the presidential palace; it was a world where one general might dispatch another over the luncheon table with a bullet to the brain; a country where a brutal secret service ran death squads in the name of "anti-subversion activities". In other words, it was exactly the kind of loyal vassal state the US has always prized and cosseted.

Even among the ex-military pilots of the KAL, though, the new cockpit crew that took over was (a word that is becoming tiresome but can't be avoided) remarkable. The captain was Chun Byung-In, who had once been a fighter pilot and a Lieutenant Colonel in the South Korean Air Force. A former flight formation leader and aerobatics pilot, he had been nominated as the personal pilot of no less than the (military dictator) president of South Korea. The South Korean ambassador to the US – yet another general – was a personal friend of his. He had been a KAL pilot since 1972 – eleven years at the time – of which as many as five had been spent flying the Seoul-Anchorage route, which means he knew every bit of that

route extremely well. His rating as a pilot was so exceptional and his attention to detail so great that among his colleagues he was known as the “human computer”.

There was another thing about Chun. According to Johnson, he had once before, flying the Alaska-Seoul route, “encountered Soviet fighters”. What happened then, and the circumstances that led to this “encounter”, are “undisclosed”.

The co-pilot, Son Dong-Hui, was yet another former Lieutenant Colonel in the South Korean Air Force who had served in the military for twenty years. After leaving the SKAF he had been recruited by the South Korean Ministry of Transport – which was headed, under the military dictatorship then in power in Seoul, by a general, of course – and had nearly as much flying experience as Chun himself. Reading over what I’ve just written, I wonder why such a very experienced man would only be a co-pilot. Surely he ought to have been given a command of his own by this point?

The flight engineer, Kim Eui-Dong, was a former member of the (South) Korean Marine Aviation Corps, had himself passed a proficiency check only a month before, and was no beginner on 747s; he had over 2600 flying hours on them. So, if you consider their collective ability and experience, one would have thought that everything would have gone like clockwork.

Which is why what next happened, while the plane was still on the ground in Anchorage, was so unusual. Aircraft routes and fuel loading are no longer, and have for many decades not been, a matter of guesswork and chance. Aeroplanes follow air traffic routes as clearly marked out – by radio beacons and navigational landmarks – as highways on land. KAL 007, like almost all planes on the Anchorage-Seoul route, was to follow Romeo 20, a route that roughly paralleled the Soviet coastline and was just 28 kilometres outside Soviet territorial waters off Kamchatka. That route was not only well known and heavily travelled, it was also very familiar to all the cockpit crew, as has been described, and especially to Captain Chun.

From this point on there is an irritating problem with Johnson: his insistence on using American “units” instead of metric figures a normal person might understand. As a British author this is doubly irritating because the book was written over a decade after his country had switched to the metric system. However, the KAL plane apparently used, for whatever reason, American “units” for loads and fuel, so I am going to repeat that and use metric whenever I have any chance to do so. And, no, I make no apologies whatever for putting the word “units” in quotes when applied to what Americans use.

Now, fuel loads to be carried for the journey were calculated by computer based on the plane’s load, distance to be flown, wind conditions, and temperatures. The normal length of the flight was 8 hours 20 minutes, but with helpful wind conditions predicted, the journey was expected on this occasion to be 27 minutes shorter. The computer took that into account, and added extras as follows: forty minutes’ worth of fuel to cater for diversions, thirty minutes’ more in case of holding patterns over airports, and an additional

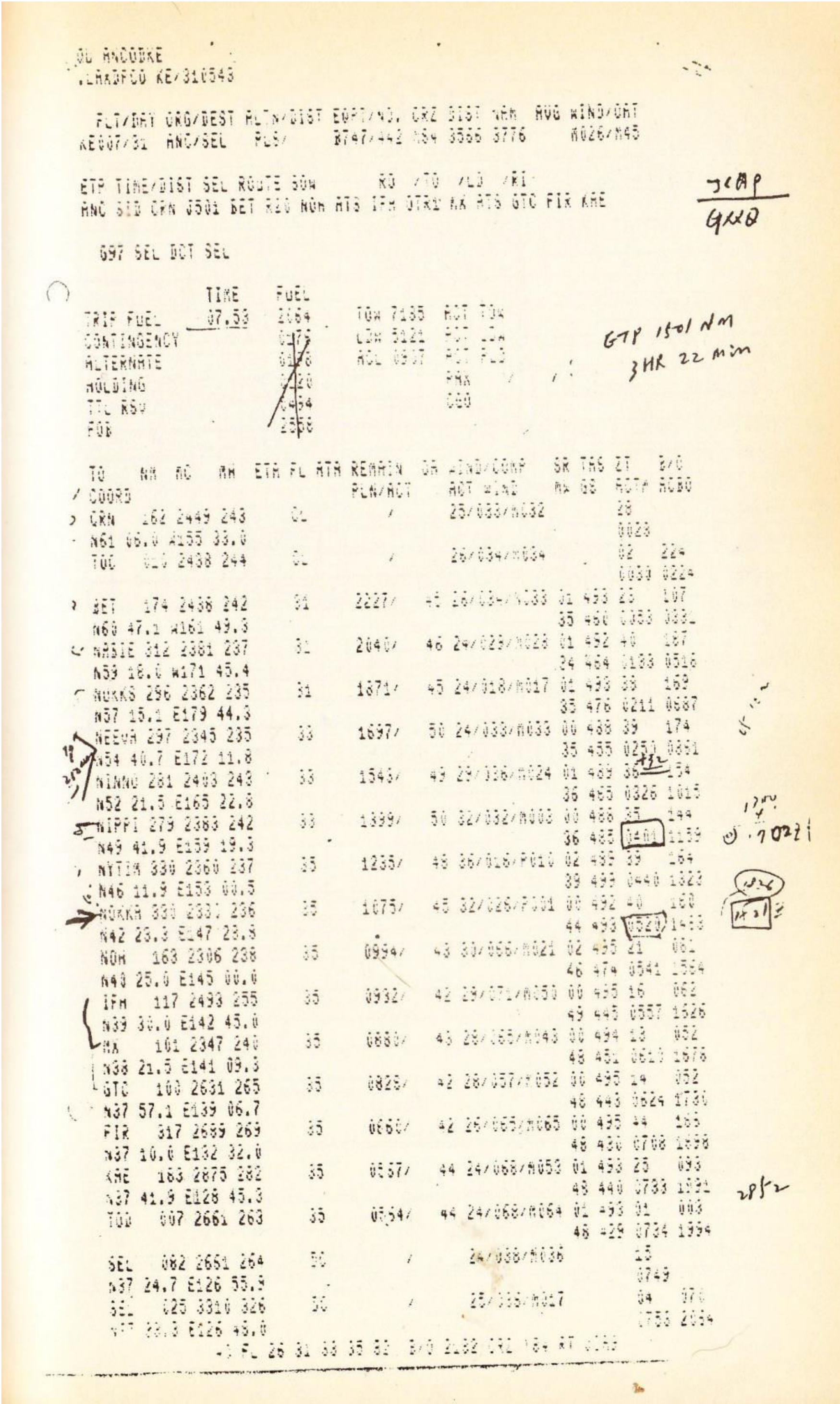
10% on top of that for emergencies. The figure came to 255800 pounds of fuel, and was mentioned as such on the Computerised Flight Plan filed by Chun. Now something very strange happened: Chun crossed out the 255800 pound figure and on a second document, the Flight Release Sheet, noted that he had actually loaded 253700 pounds. With 2000 pounds – roughly 900 kilograms, if I remember right – required for taxiing on the runway, this meant that when KAL 007 took off, it would have had 251700 pounds on board...a whopping 4100 pounds less than what the computer had said would be needed.

This would have been bizarre enough, but we aren't done yet. Another document, the Weights and Balance Manifest, showed that in *reality* Chun loaded 263700 pounds of fuel plus another 2000 pounds for taxiing. This meant he loaded, in reality, ten thousand pounds – *five tons* – more fuel than he had written on the Flight Release Sheet, and 7000 pounds more even than the figure the computer had said would be necessary.

There is absolutely no doubt about these figures; Johnson not only cites them, he provides Photostat copies of the three documents with Chun's writing on them with the claimed and actual fuel loads. This would be not just an incredible error for as meticulous a pilot as Chun, but a very expensive one; fuel isn't free, and carrying tons of extra load which – if the plane proceeded according to the normal route – would never be used would merely cause extra fuel consumption and reduce the profit that might be made on the trip.

Here are the three documents, as included by Johnson in the appendix to his book, with Chun's notations:

First, the Computerised Flight Plan:



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QU ANCODKE
.LAXDFCO KE/310543

 FLT/DAY ORG/DEST ALTN/DIST EQPT/NO. CRZ DIST NAM  AVG WIND/OAT
KE007/31  ANC/SEL   PUS/      B747/442 .84 3566 3776      M026/M45

ETP TIME/DIST SEL ROUTE 50W        RO  /TO  /LD  /RI
ANC SID CRN J501 BET R20 NOH ATS IFM OTR2 KK ATS GTC FIR KAE

 697 SEL DCT SEL

               TIME    FUEL
TRIP FUEL      07.53   2064     TOW 7135  ACT TOW
CONTINGENCY            0178     LDW 5121  ACT LDW
ALTERNATE              0178     AOL 0507  ACT FLD
HOLDING                0120               FMX
TTL RSV                0454               000
FOB                    2558

TO    NM  AC   MH  ETA FL ATA REMAIN  GR WIND/COMP    SR TAS ZT   B/O
/ COORD                      PLN/ACT     ACT WIND     MX GS  ACTM ACBO
CRN   262 2449 243      OL          /       25/033/M032          28
 N61 06.0 W155 33.0                                              0028
TOC   020 2438 244      OL          /       26/034/M034          02   224
                                                                 0030 0224
BET   174 2438 242      31     2227/    45 26/034/M033 01 453 23   107
 N60 47.1 W161 49.3                                    35 460 0053 0331
NASIE 312 2381 237      31     2040/    46 24/023/M028 01 452 40   187
 N59 18.0 W171 45.4                                    24 464 0133 0518
NUKKS 296 2362 235      31     1871/    45 24/018/M017 01 493 38   169
 N57 15.1 E179 44.3                                    35 476 0211 0687
NEEVA 297 2345 235      33     1697/    50 24/033/M033 00 488 39   174
 N54 40.7 E172 11.8                                    35 455 0250 0861
NINNO 281 2403 243      33     1543/    49 29/036/M024 01 489 36   154
 N52 21.5 E165 22.8                                    36 465 0326 1015
NIPPI 279 2383 242      33     1399/    50 32/032/M003 00 486 35   144
 N49 41.9 E159 19.3                                    36 485 0401 1159
NYTIM 330 2360 237      35     1235/    48 36/018/P010 02 495 39   164
 N46 11.9 E153 00.5                                    39 499 0440 1323
NOKKA 330 2337 236      35     1075/    45 32/026/P001 00 492 40   160
 N42 23.3 E147 23.8                                    44 493 0520 1483
NOH   163 2306 238      35     0994/    43 30/066/M021 02 455 21   081
 N40 25.0 E145 00.0                                    46 474 0541 1564
IFM   117 2493 255      35     0932/    42 29/071/M050 00 455 16   062
 N39 30.0 E142 45.0                                    49 445 0557 1626
KK    101 2347 240      35     0880/    43 28/065/M043 00 494 13   052
 N38 21.5 E141 09.3                                    48 451 0610 1678
GTC   100 2631 265      35     0828/    42 28/057/M052 00 495 14   052
 N37 57.1 E139 06.7                                    48 443 0624 1730
FIR   317 2689 269      35     0660/    42 26/065/M065 00 495 44   165
 N37 10.0 E132 32.0                                    48 430 0708 1898
KAE   163 2875 282      35     0567/    44 24/068/M053 01 493 25   093
 N37 41.9 E128 45.3                                    48 440 0733 1991
TOD   007 2661 263      35     0564/    44 24/068/M064 01 493 01   003
                                                       48 429 0734 1994

SEL   082 2661 264      50          /       24/038/M036          15
 N37 24.7 E126 55.9                                              0749
SEL   025 3310 326      50          /       25/036/M027          04   070
 N37 33.3 E126 48.0                                              0753 2064
        .. FL 26 31 33 35 52  B/O 2182 CRZ .84 AT 0180
```

JCAP
GXXQ

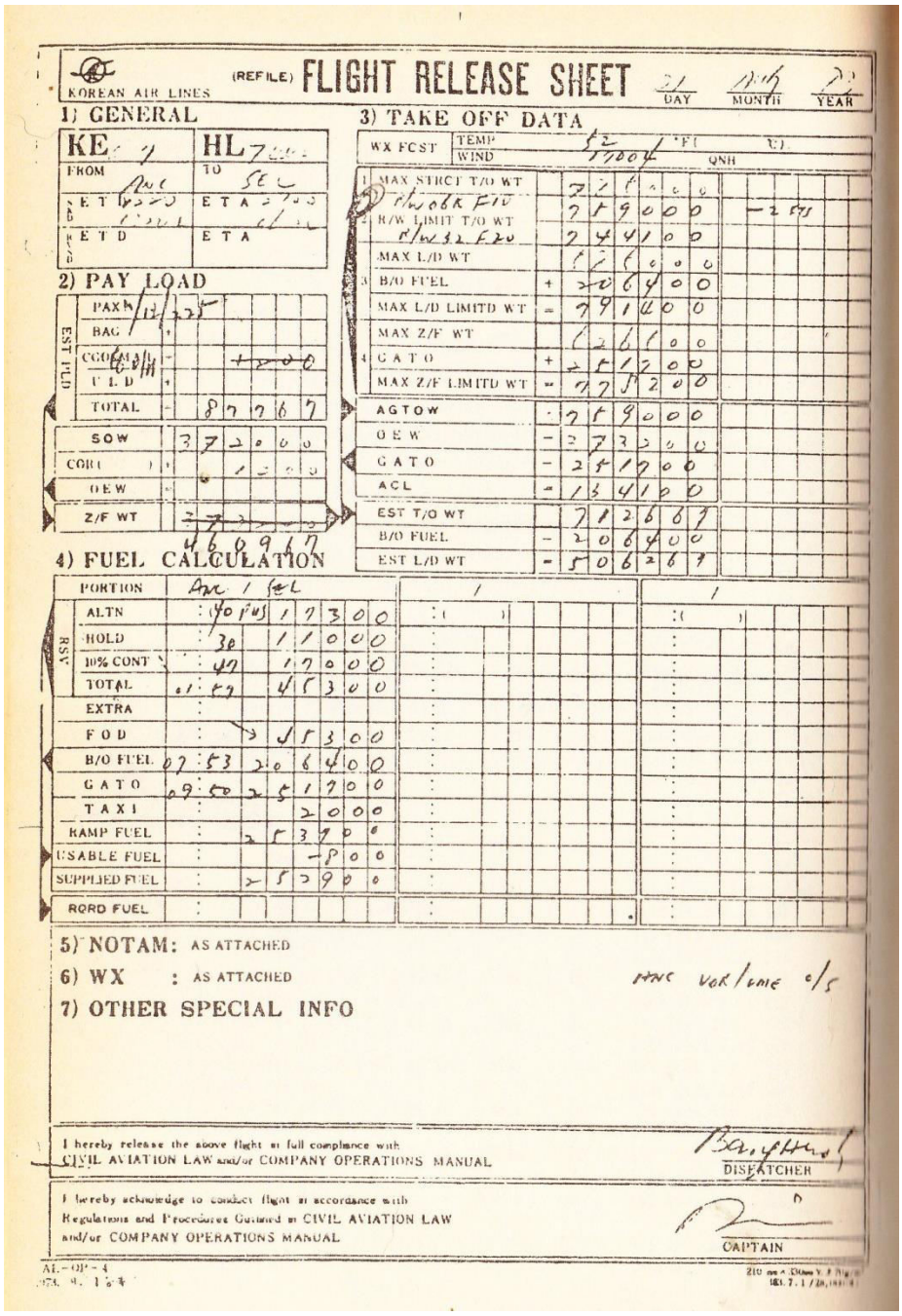
GTP 1501 NM
3HR 22 min

0:70221

1826
1431

2852

Then, the Flight Release Sheet:



KOREAN AIR LINES (REFILE) FLIGHT RELEASE SHEET 21 DAY 11 MONTH 73 YEAR

1) GENERAL

KE 7 HL 7...

FROM ... TO SE...

ETD ... ETA ...

ETD ... ETA ...

2) PAY LOAD

EST PLD

PAX 112/225

BAG

CGO

T L D

TOTAL 87167

SOW 372000

CGO

OEW

Z/F WT 372000 460967

3) TAKE OFF DATA

WX FCST TEMP 52 °F °C

WIND 17004 QNH

1	MAX STRCT T/O WT		7	7	1	0	0
2	R/W LIMIT T/O WT		7	1	9	0	0
	R/W 32 F20		7	4	4	1	0
	MAX L/D WT		1	2	6	0	0
3	B/O FUEL	+	2	0	6	4	0
	MAX L/D LIMITD WT	=	7	9	1	4	0
	MAX Z/F WT		1	2	6	0	0
4	G A T O	+	2	1	1	2	0
	MAX Z/F LIMITD WT	=	7	7	1	2	0
	AGTOW	-	7	1	9	0	0
	O E W	-	3	7	3	2	0
	G A T O	-	2	1	1	2	0
	ACL	=	1	3	4	1	0
	EST T/O WT		7	1	2	6	0
	B/O FUEL	-	2	0	6	4	0
	EST L/D WT	=	5	0	6	2	0

4) FUEL CALCULATION

PORTION							
RSV ALTN	40	PUS	1	1	3	0	0
RSV HOLD	30		1	1	0	0	0
RSV 10% CONT	47		1	1	0	0	0
RSV TOTAL	01:57		4	5	3	0	0
EXTRA							
F O D				1	5	3	0	0
B/O FUEL	07:53		2	0	6	4	0	0
G A T O	09:50		2	1	1	2	0	0
T A X I					2	0	0	0
RAMP FUEL			2	1	3	9	0	0
USABLE FUEL						8	0	0
SUPPLIED FUEL			2	1	3	9	0	0
RQRD FUEL								

5) NOTAM: AS ATTACHED

6) WX : AS ATTACHED

HNC VOR/DME C/S

7) OTHER SPECIAL INFO

I hereby release the above flight in full compliance with CIVIL AVIATION LAW and/or COMPANY OPERATIONS MANUAL

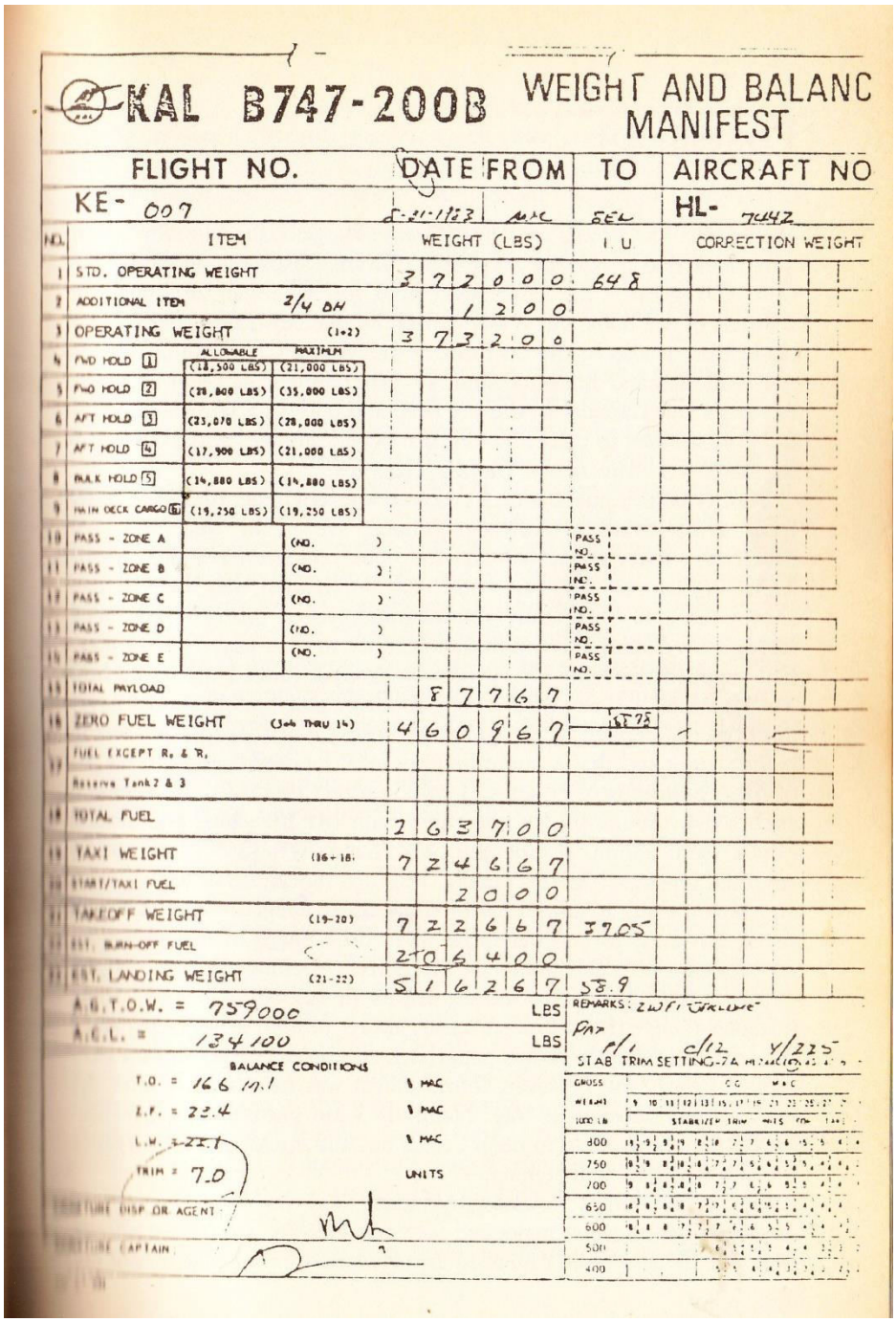
DISPATCHER

I hereby acknowledge to conduct flight in accordance with Regulations and Procedures Outlined in CIVIL AVIATION LAW and/or COMPANY OPERATIONS MANUAL

CAPTAIN

AL-OP-4

And here is the Weight and Balance Manifest:



KAL B747-200B WEIGHT AND BALANC MANIFEST

FLIGHT NO.	DATE	FROM	TO	AIRCRAFT NO
KE- 007	8-21-1983	ANC	SEL	HL- 7442

NO.	ITEM			WEIGHT (LBS)	I. U	CORRECTION WEIGHT
1	STD. OPERATING WEIGHT			372000	648	
2	ADDITIONAL ITEM	2/4 DH		1200		
3	OPERATING WEIGHT		(1+2)	373200		
4	FWD HOLD 1	ALLOWABLE (18,500 LBS)	MAXIMUM (21,000 LBS)			
5	FWD HOLD 2	(28,800 LBS)	(35,000 LBS)			
6	AFT HOLD 3	(23,070 LBS)	(28,000 LBS)			
7	AFT HOLD 4	(17,900 LBS)	(21,000 LBS)			
8	BULK HOLD 5	(14,880 LBS)	(14,880 LBS)			
9	MAIN DECK CARGO 6	(19,250 LBS)	(19,250 LBS)			
10	PASS - ZONE A		(NO.)		PASS NO.	
11	PASS - ZONE B		(NO.)		PASS NO.	
12	PASS - ZONE C		(NO.)		PASS NO.	
13	PASS - ZONE D		(NO.)		PASS NO.	
14	PASS - ZONE E		(NO.)		PASS NO.	
15	TOTAL PAYLOAD			87767		
16	ZERO FUEL WEIGHT		(3+6 THRU 14)	460967	575	
17	FUEL EXCEPT R. & R. Reserve Tank 2 & 3					
18	TOTAL FUEL			263700		
19	TAXI WEIGHT		(16+18)	724667		
20	START/TAXI FUEL			2000		
21	TAKEOFF WEIGHT		(19-20)	722667	379.05	
22	EST. BURN-OFF FUEL			270400		
23	EST. LANDING WEIGHT		(21-22)	516267	58.9	

A.G.T.O.W. = 759000 LBS

A.E.L. = 734100 LBS

REMARKS: ZWFI FAILURE

PAX F/ C/12 Y/225

STAB TRIM SETTING-7A

BALANCE CONDITIONS

T.O. = 16.6 M.I % MAC

L.E. = 22.4 % MAC

L.W. = 22.1 % MAC

TRIM = 7.0 UNITS

GROSS WEIGHT 1000 LB — C.G. % MAC — STABILIZER TRIM UNITS

800 750 700 650 600 500 400

FLIGHT DISP OR AGENT

CAPTAIN

I just said something about the plane proceeding according to the normal route. There is another thing that Chun did on the Computerised Flight Plan: he made a series of marginal notes which corresponded, not to the Romeo 20 flight route, but to another route altogether; a route, as we shall see, he was to, in reality, follow.

Talking about profit, there is another interesting thing that happened at this point. As I have said, the plane was flying about a third empty, so passenger revenues would be expected to be 30% less than usual. The operating expenses of the flight – fuel consumption, insurance charges, airport landing fees, crew salaries, depreciation etc – don't get reduced if you fly with fewer passengers, of course. So – as a loyal employee of KAL – Chun would be expected to try and maximise whatever profit he could make. Even so, as clearly seen in the Flight Release Sheet, Chun *crossed out* a cargo load totalling 1800 pounds. Instead of looking for ways to make more money, he refused to load a cargo that would have been lucrative to haul.

This wasn't all that happened at Anchorage either. While KAL 007 was still on the ground, another KAL Boeing 747, KAL 015, flying from Los Angeles to Seoul, touched down. Its passengers, too, deplaned and mingled with the 007 passengers who were browsing the airport stalls. Among them were three other ultra-right wing US politicians, two Senators and a Congressman. They were unaware that their friend Larry MacDonald was aboard 007, sleeping. As they said later, if they had met him at the airport, they would have made him change planes to make the Seoul flight with them instead. Apparently you could do that kind of thing in those days, or perhaps it was a privilege extended by KAL only to extreme right wing American politicians.

After the tragedy, it was alleged by the extreme right in America that the Soviets had deliberately lured 007 off course – perhaps by some kind of electronic ray – so as to murder MacDonald; one of the many, many reasons why this was absurd was that not only was the USSR unaware of his presence on the plane (even assuming they would have wanted to kill him at all), not even his own fellow politicians knew. MacDonald, in fact, was on 007 only because of a delayed connecting flight which had made him miss his original plane. There was absolutely no way anyone could have plotted to kill him in advance by shooting down 007, simply because it was a total accident that he was on the plane at all.

007 and 015, as I said, would both be flying from Anchorage to Seoul. They would both be flying the same route, Romeo 20, with 015 following 007. Because, as I have said, wind conditions predicted that the flight would be 27 minutes shorter than usual, the original takeoff time was pushed back from 1220 to 1250. The excuse for this delay was that the customs in Seoul airport did not begin functioning till 0600, so the flights were scheduled to land just after that. This is not a particularly persuasive argument, even as Johnson notes – landing, taxiing, and deplaning the passengers in a major airport takes about half an hour in any case, even without any holding patterns over the airport prior to landing. Even so, 007 did not take off till 1300 – a full forty minutes later than originally scheduled.

015, meanwhile, had been scheduled to leave Anchorage 20 minutes after 007. However, unlike 007, which took off much later than scheduled, it for some reason left *earlier*; just 14 minutes after 007. What it then did will be described shortly.

Let's summarise the oddities that happened on the ground in Anchorage, for those who are losing track:

First, the plane received a new cabin crew which was much larger than normally carried on a fully loaded 747, even though the aircraft was a third empty. In addition, six additional cockpit crew members were boarded, all of whom were flying as passengers, making a grand total of three cockpit crews on board.

Secondly, the three-man official cockpit crew were all ex-military pilots with extreme experience, not just generally but of this particular route, and the captain in particular was a close intimate of the military dictatorship ruling the country. Despite his reputation for extreme thoroughness, though, he loaded *much* more fuel than the computer calculated he would need, but claimed to have loaded much *less*. He also, on the margins of the flight plan, noted a totally different flight path than the one he had followed for five years on this route. And, despite the fact that the plane was flying with a sharply reduced fare-paying passenger load, he cancelled cargo which was ready to be loaded and thus paid for.

Third, while having already delayed on the ground, the plane took off even later than rescheduled – while another plane, from the same airline and flying to the same destination, took off earlier than it was scheduled to. This meant that the two planes were flying remarkably close together – or would have been, if they were actually flying on the path they were supposed to.

Right.

I have to mention at this point that the Wikipedia article[4] on this episode hardly says anything about these oddities about 007's time at Anchorage. This is by far from being the only deficiency in the article; there are so many problems that it merits some discussion of its own in the course of this narrative.

Before we go on to the details of KAL 007's (and KAL 015's) activities in the air, it's time for a short detour to talk about the navigation system planes at the time used.

Section 2: The navigation equipment.

This was, let us remember, 1983. While what is now called GPS existed, it was restricted to the US military and was only released to the general public later. That was *not* to say that the navigation equipment available was primitive. Far from it.

As part of the preparation for the take off, Chun and his crew programmed the Inertial Navigation System. This comprised three separate computers, independently linked to a gyroscope. The three separate computers were so that the plane could survive not one but two computer malfunctions. The flight

engineer would enter the current position, destination, and coordinates to “waypoints” – reporting points over the sea corresponding to geographical coordinates. For the particular route in question, the waypoints were, in sequence, Bethel, NABIE, NEEVA, NIPPI, NOKKA and NOHO. At NOHO – which was south of Japan – the final coordinates to Seoul would be entered. The INS was so accurate that it would calculate the plane’s position to less than a 1.5 kilometre error in a flight of 8000 kilometres; not only that, it would correct itself for such variables as the plane’s speed, outside wind, altitude, and wing angle. So even if the winds and so on weren’t as expected, the plane would accommodate all that. And just so that there wasn’t any error made by the crew while entering the information, the readings used to programme the INS were supplied by the airline in cassettes which would be run through one of the INS computers. The flight engineer would read off the figures on his INS computer, while the two pilots would check on the other two computers to make sure the figures were correct.

Therefore, if the INS was wrongly programmed, it could only have happened because of a wrongly programmed cassette provided to the crew. But afterwards these cassettes were checked and found properly programmed, so there is no possibility that the INS was at fault due to improper programming.

According to the Wikipedia article, INS had a crucial design defect. If it moved more than 7.5 nautical miles off the preprogrammed route before being turned on, it would follow the rote it had formerly been on, not the one INS meant it to follow, as long as it stayed that minimum distance of 7.5 nautical miles from the original route. The implication, as per Wikipedia, is that the pilots had veered more than 7.5 nautical miles off course before switching to INS from HEADING (see below), and therefore had passed the rest of the flight unaware of their true position owing to navigational error. Why this is an unacceptable argument will become more than clear in the further course of this narrative.

INS wasn’t the only navigational aid 007 had on board. It also had the autopilot on HEADING, which maintained a constant magnetic course selected by the pilot. Then there was the VHF Omni range radio beacon (VOR), which locked on to radio beacons selected by the pilot. The Anchorage VOR was shut down for “maintenance” on this night, and that was communicated to Chun an hour before take off. Johnson suggests that this might be added to the already immense load of oddities of the flight, but it could as easily have been a genuine coincidence; I can’t see much benefit in deliberately turning off the VOR at the start of the flight. In any case, this was not a major problem; the next VOR beacon was at Bethel, 346 “miles” (another of the irritations of these American “units” is that one doesn’t know if it means miles – 1.6 kilometres – or nautical miles – 1.8 kilometres; when we’re talking of hundreds of “miles” the 200 metres extra adds up. Wikipedia says it meant 557 kilometres in this instance) into the flight. All Chun had to do was to be certain that he located the Bethel beacon and confirmed his position and heading there.

There were yet more navigational aids. One was the ILS, the Instrument Landing System, which would help the plane land even in zero visibility, with the aid of airport beacons; it is not relevant to this discussion. But even if all these failed, 007 also had two compasses in the cockpit, as I said. Of these the number two was inoperative but there was nothing wrong with number one compass.

Takahashi also says 007 would have carried a sextant for fixing the position sighting on a star and the horizon. Back in physics optics class in college I was taught to use a sextant, but it's kind of difficult to imagine a pilot peering through it, lowering the image of the star to the horizon, and then marking off the angle, all the while over the ocean – and not making, as will be seen, some kind of distress call instead. So whether a sextant existed in the cockpit or not is probably entirely irrelevant anyway.

Quite in addition to all this, 007 had ground mapping radar. This radar, which showed the image of whatever the plane happened to be flying over, would in this case, once 007 had cleared Alaska, *normally* have showed flat ocean all the way to Japan. If the plane had steered off course – towards Soviet Kuril islands or Sakhalin, say – the ground mapping radars would have shown the territory instantly. The high, rocky Kurils and Sakhalin are, Johnson quotes a pilot as saying, "beautiful radar targets"; a pilot only had to keep them "fifty miles" to his right to be sure of being safe in international airspace.

Having bored you with this – unfortunately necessary – talk about the navigational instruments 007 had, it's time we got back to the flight itself.

Section 3: Anchorage to Kamchatka.

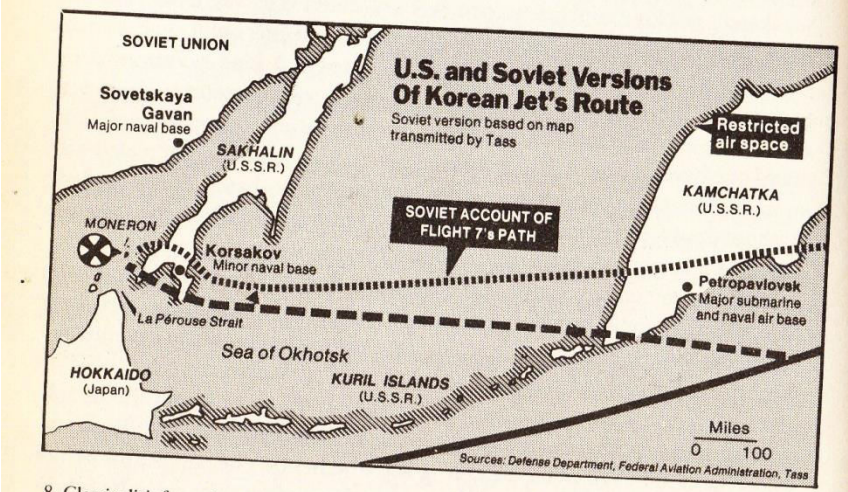
We have said that the VOR beacon at Anchorage was down for maintenance, and that at least Johnson suspects that this may not have been a coincidence. Be that as it may, Captain Chun was aware of that fact long before take-off, and all he had to do was steer for the Bethel beacon to establish his position. In fact, given that he was a highly experienced pilot with a reputation for multiple cross-checks and sticking to the book, he would have known to be specifically careful on the route to Bethel so as to locate it. Also, and vitally, he would have had to report by radio when he got to Bethel; the six waypoints I have mentioned in the section on navigation were those (there were nine in all on this route) at which reporting by radio to ground control was *compulsory*. If a plane failed to report, it would be assumed that something had happened to it and – under normal circumstances – emergency procedures would be set in motion.

If you haven't guessed already, these weren't normal circumstances, and we will see what actually happened.

At 28 minutes after 007 took off, radar showed it to have already deviated nine kilometres north of Romeo 20. Even the Wikipedia article agrees on this, showing that the plane began going off course almost at once after taking off. Anchorage air control did not inform 007 of this deviation, assuming that it would correct its position at the VOR at Bethel.

This initial deviation is significant in another way. After the destruction of 007, the American government initially claimed that the plane had stuck to its correct route until it passed Kamchatka, and only *then* made a turn towards Sakhalin.

Johnson provides this map:



8 Classic disinformation tactics: the US version of the route taken by KAL 007, provided to the *New York Times* (6 September 1983) and the rest of the world's media by the US Defense Department and the Federal Aviation Administration. The map suggests that 007 was on its correct course until just before Kamchatka; that it only just skirted Kamchatka and Sakhalin; and that the configuration of its final turn over Sakhalin was quite different from that actually taken. Yet this map was provided many days after US radars had revealed the truth – which would, in this case, have largely confirmed the Soviet version of 007's route.

Wikipedia conveniently avoids mention of this – as so much else, as we will see – but both Johnson and Clubb published, in their books, the initial American map of the plane's alleged showing a sudden diversion towards Sakhalin from the south of Kamchatka. It was a deliberate lie and there was absolutely no possibility – going by its *own radars* – that the US government was not aware that it was a lie. As that initial tale began to unravel, it admitted that 007 had been off course from the beginning, but made that into a "justification" for the hypothesis that it was all due to a combination of INS and pilot error. And then it produced another map, which, as we will also see, is no less fictional than the original one.

Fifty minutes out of Anchorage – and by then outside the range of Anchorage radar – 007 radioed, as it compulsorily had to do, and reported that it was passing Bethel. This was not true, because the US military radar at King Salmon noted that 007 was actually 12.6 nautical miles, that is, 23 kilometres, north of Bethel. This is a very important deviation for the following reasons:

First, the fact that 007 was north of Bethel was impossible under normal circumstances. The INS would have brought the plane over Bethel. Quite independently of the INS, which allegedly wouldn't work if over 7.5 nautical miles off track (this is only according to the Wikipedia claim, and the Wikipedia article is far from reliable), the autopilot locked on Bethel VOR would have done the same. Even if we assume that *both* were not functional, Chun would have still been compulsorily due to check his instruments and position at Bethel. And his ordinary compass, the Number One which was still functional, would have also showed him that he was north of his scheduled position (this compass is, for reasons unknown, not mentioned by Wikipedia. It's almost as though the Wikipedia article is committed to supporting a conclusion decided on before it was even written). As the flight proceeded and 007 deviated further and further from its route, the compass would show the deviation more and more clearly.

Second, on the course on which 007 was now flying, north of Bethel, it was heading straight into Soviet territory unless it changed course. On maps provided by the Federal Aviation Administration to US and US allied airlines flying from Alaska, Soviet airspace was marked in blue: "Warning: Aircraft infringing into non-free flying territory can be fired on without warning." Therefore, a look at the map would have shown Chun that he was headed into danger. That means if he was aware of the deviation from course and chose, for whatever reason, to wait until correcting it, he was also choosing to ignore the warning on his own map.

Third, the King Salmon radar was aware that 007 was off its route; was aware that it could not be off its route unless there was a major fault in its INS; and, furthermore, was aware that its route was taking it into forbidden territory. And yet, it made absolutely no effort to contact and warn 007 – or even to contact Anchorage and ask *them* to warn 007.

According to Johnson, these are the possible explanations that might have led to 007 being off course at Bethel; to quote:

"*Either*

1.Both the INS and autopilot were uncoupled and 007's crew failed to notice this *and* they failed to notice the amber warning light which this would produce on the autopilot. *In addition* the crew would have had to fail to notice the reading on their magnetic compass *and* the fact that their weather radar, set in ground-mapping mode, was showing a different part of the Alaskan coastline than which they should have been crossing.

Or

2.The wrong route had been deliberately programmed into the INS back in Anchorage, with the intention of flying 007 over Soviet territory. This could not have been done without the connivance of the crew, especially since they would then have known they were sending back a false position report at Bethel.

Or

3.There had been a programming error in the INS back at Anchorage *and* the autopilot locked onto Bethel VOR was not functioning to correct this *and* the crew failed to notice the same instruments as in (1) above or carry out the checks they were required to make."

There is, Johnson says, no fourth explanation.

Now we return to KAL 015. Unlike 007, 015 stuck to its assigned route. However, it flew it at an extraordinarily high speed, since it reached the NABIE waypoint "between six and eight minutes ahead of schedule." Johnson quotes one Robert Allardyce – a "veteran US pilot" – who said that in order to be so far ahead of schedule the plane must have been flying at around Mach 0.9; fast enough to set off warning buzzers on its Mach counter. Johnson also says that Anchorage ground control – to go by the radio conversation – did *not* hear this buzzer's sound, so it is, he speculates, possible that the buzzer had been switched off. That, of course, could not happen accidentally.

This speeding is not behaviour that airlines would approve of, because faster flying increases both fuel consumption and wear and tear on the engines. Also, 015 had neither asked nor obtained permission from Anchorage to fly at this speed (on the flight plan filed by both 015 and 007, the speed mentioned was Mach 0.84). Unauthorised speeding like this can be extremely dangerous in heavily travelled air lanes because of the danger of collision with another plane which might not know you were there. Besides, as we have seen, there was no official reason to fly faster in any case; the planes were not supposed to reach Seoul before six in the morning. Wikipedia, not surprisingly, almost ignores the existence of 015 except in the matter of relaying radio communications, which we will mention in due course. But if we are to examine the *facts* of 007's last journey, rather than cherry-pick items to support a pre-decided conclusion, 015 acquires a position of great importance.

While 015 was rushing along at not much less than the speed of sound, 007, strangely enough, was doing the opposite, if its reports are to be believed. It reported by radio (indirectly, as we'll see) passing NABIE two minutes behind schedule, at which time it rescheduled its arrival at the next compulsory waypoint, NEEVA. By the time it reached NEEVA, though, it was flying seven minutes behind this new rescheduled time, so it was nine minutes late overall.

Let's go over this one more time: 015 leaves 14 minutes behind 007 and catches up at least six, and possibly eight minutes, en route. During this same period, 007 loses, first two, and then nine minutes. So – if they were flying the same route – 015 should have almost caught up to 007, or indeed even crossed it. In either case, they should be reporting the same weather conditions back to Anchorage, since they were – allegedly – moving through the same bit of sky at the same time. Oddly enough – if one can still use the word "odd" to refer to this night – the weather conditions, particularly wind reports, reported by the two planes were totally different.

This discrepancy should have been noticed by KAL 015, for one simple and very important reason: as KAL 007 diverged increasingly from its original path it went out of radio range of Anchorage, so it used 015 to relay its radio reports. This relaying of reports, Johnson and Wikipedia agree, wasn't an unusual practice.

What was unusual – very unusual – was what happened at waypoint NABIE. This was, as I said, a compulsory reporting waypoint. 007 was supposed to pass it at 1430, and Chun should have reported then. He did no such thing. After two minutes had passed, Anchorage called 007 on the (VHF) radio, only to receive "unintelligible squawks" in response. It attempted again to contact 007 at 1434, with the same result. A simultaneous attempt to contact 007 from an Anchorage remote controlled radio on St Paul's Island failed as well.

This was, as I said earlier, a situation which would call for emergency measures. Anchorage now decided to try and contact 007 on the HF radio via a separate service, the Anchorage Flight Service Station/International Flight Service Station (FFS/IFSS). At this moment 015 contacted Anchorage ground control and said it was passing on 007's report for NABIE (including the two minute delay and the rescheduled time to NEEVA referred to earlier). It was only at 1444 – all of 14 minutes late, an eternity in flight control time – that 007 *itself* contacted Anchorage; not ground control, but FSS/IFSS – and gave its own report for NABIE. FSS/IFSS told 007 to make its next waypoint report (at NEEVA) directly to Anchorage ground control, and by VHF radio. It then ordered 015 to pass on the same message to 007, just to make sure it got it.

Will it come as a surprise to the reader by now if I reveal that 007 ignored this order completely?

Actually, of course, 007 had never been at NABIE at all. Assuming 007 had continued on its (erroneous) course from Bethel, it would have been 100 "miles" (160 or 180 kilometres, a rather big difference, as I said) north of NABIE. If it had *turned* after passing Bethel in order to correctly cross NABIE, then things become even more difficult for those who try and claim that the plane was of course by accident, because then they have to find some kind of explanation of how it managed to drift off course again.

No, Captain Chun could not have *mistakenly* said he was passing NABIE. There is no chance of that, because planes passing NABIE came in range of US military radars and radio on St Paul's Island and

used them for a position check. Around the same time, they would also come within range of US military radar and VOR on Shemya Island (in the Aleutians) and would cross check position with that as well. So, Chun either somehow managed to *not* use all these locators*, and* missed out on all the same instruments as at Bethel, or...was deliberately lying about having crossed NABIE. There is no third explanation.

As even Wikipedia admits, during all this time 007 was under US military radar coverage, including a full forty minutes when it was under overlapping coverage of both King Salmon and Newenham radars. This was in addition to radars on Shemya, on ships at sea, and on other planes (of which we'll soon be hearing). At no point did any of these American military radars attempt to have 007 contacted, either directly or through Anchorage, though they could see it was headed towards trouble.

I wonder why.

Meanwhile, at or about 1551, 007 then came into range of Soviet radar. From now on, it was not just a plane off course.

It was a target.

To go back a little, 007 had said, via 015, that it would reach NEEVA at a revised time – 1553 – at which it was under strict orders to contact Anchorage ground control direct by VHF radio to report. It did no such thing. Wonder of wonders, Anchorage ground control, which had been so anxious at NABIE, this time took no action whatever to try and contact 007. Only at 1600 – a full seven minutes after 007 was due at NEEVA – did it call...015. Not 007, 015. And 015 reported that it was passing on 007's NEEVA report. Why did 015 not pass on the report at once, instead of waiting for Anchorage to call? Sounds like a girl waiting for her guy to ask her out on a date on which she's secretly dying to go if you ask me.

You know, by this point I'm already beginning to run out of sarcastic things to say about all the remarkable things that were happening on that night, and the story is barely getting started.

Almost four minutes after *this*, ten minutes after its due time at NEEVA, 007 called...FSS/IFSS. The same people who had ordered it to call Anchorage ground control, not them. And all it did was transmit its call sign thrice and then go back to radio silence.

Curiouser and curiouser, said Alice to herself!

Of course, 007 hadn't been anywhere near NEEVA. By this time it had been 150 "miles" off course, to the north-west. And this would have brought its radar within range of the Kamchatka coast, which would be instantly recognisable on the screen. At that point the Kamchatka coast was just half the distance to the maximum range of the weather radar in ground mapping mode, so there's *no way* it could not have been seen.

But suppose the radar had failed? Well, did I mention that 007 was carrying *two* of them?

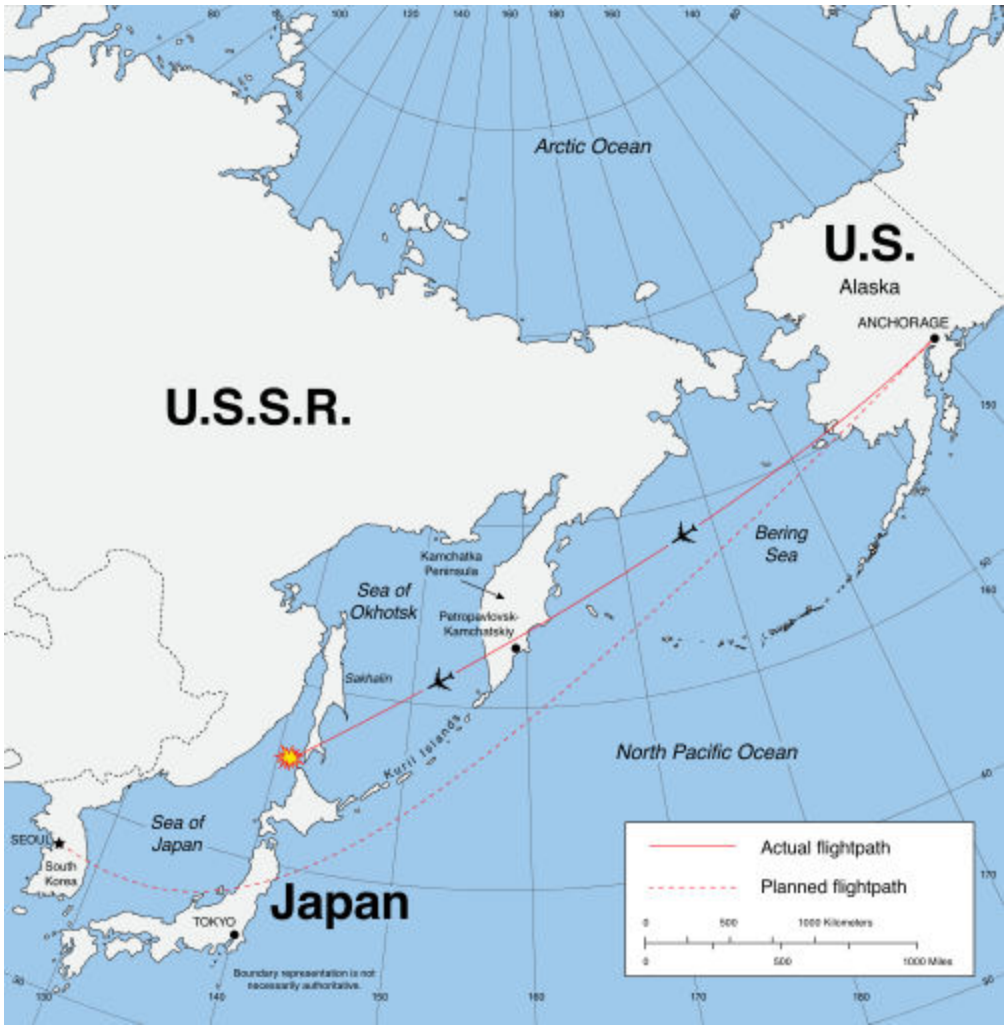
At approximately this time, 007 came close to a US RC 135 surveillance plane. In the introductory section to this article, I said that US surveillance of this area was round the clock and intense; one RC 135 normally came on duty as another flew off back to base. Therefore, the presence of the RC 135 could be assumed, under normal circumstances, not to be unusual. However, what *was* unusual was what happened after the shootdown, when, as we'll see, the US first attempted to deny the presence of the RC 135 altogether, and then, when forced to admit it *had* been there, misrepresented its capabilities and almost certainly its mission.

Around this time, according to Johnson, KAL 007, which had been seriously lagging in velocity, suddenly speeded up. By the time it would make the next waypoint report, it had caught up two minutes on its schedule. This velocity change would have been, of course, highly visible on all the radars concerned, both American and Russian.

The RC 135 and 007 converged on each other north of the Soviet Komandorski islands. Johnson argues convincingly that the two planes could not have met anywhere else, because the only two other possible positions were either *over* the Komadorskis – Soviet territory – or *south* of them, because *that* would have meant 007 would never have overflown Kamchatka and Sakhalin at all. And that, in turn, means that 007 must have made a course change to have reached that point, turning to the west, because otherwise it – flying on its original "mistaken" course from Bethel – would not have touched anything but the southern tip of Sakhalin at all. The Soviets said, according to transcripts of their radio conversations *released by the US*, that at this point 007 was flying at 240 degrees, while its heading from Bethel was 252 degrees. Even if the Soviet radio transcript is ignored, simply going by what happened afterwards, there *had* to have been a course change, and there is *no way* the "off course by accident" theorists can explain this.

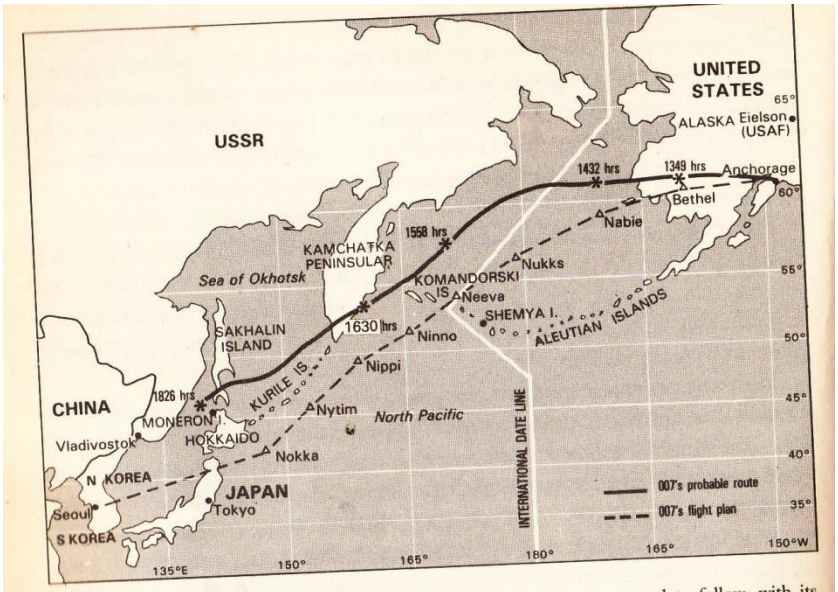
Is it then a surprise that Wikipedia not only does not refer to this course change, which actually put 007 on a route parallel to Romeo 20, but publishes what it says, without a hint of irony, is "a simplified CIA map" – not showing any deviation at all?

Here is the Wikipedia map:



Note that it's quite different from the map posted earlier, which had 007 sharply diverge from Romeo 20 just south of Kamchatka.

And here is the real map, showing the waypoints and the two places at which 007 changed course. Note specifically the curve over Sakhalin, and how this doesn't appear in the CIA map published by Wikipedia at all.



1 007's probable route, and the Romeo 20 route which 007 was supposed to follow, with its waypoints marked. NUKKS, NINNO and NYTIM are non-compulsory reporting waypoints: the route cuts the international dateline near NEEVA. *Source*: Robert W. Allardyce and James Gollin, 'The Final Moments of KAL 007', *Berkshire Eagle*, 23 May 1985; Eugene Kozicharow, 'FAA Studies Upgraded Pacific Navaids', *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 19 September 1983.

A word about the RC 135. It, too, was a Boeing product, based on the Boeing 707 fuselage, and this was rather smaller than a 747. On the radar screen, though, the two looked identical – "banana shapes". One can't tell aircraft type from the radar image. According to Soviet sources, the two radar blips – the RC and 007 – came so close together that they merged into a single image, and stayed merged for ten full minutes – from 1601 t0 1611. When they separated, there was no real way of telling which was which.

One can readily surmise that it was virtually impossible for the cockpit crew of 007 to be unaware of the presence of the RC 135. Even if they couldn't *see* it, they had to have picked it up on radar. If they had been so criminally negligent as to not check their radar, they couldn't have been competent to be allowed in the cockpit at all. And yet, this seems to have set off no alarm bells ringing in Chun's mind. A near encounter with a plane which – assuming he was in his right place – shouldn't have been there at all? Even *I* would have been alarmed, and I can't even fly a plane.

And then things got even more peculiar.

On leaving Anchorage, 007 had been permitted to fly at 31000 feet. I assume that means approximately 10000 metres, but not exactly. When 015 reported on 007's behalf, it confirmed the latter was still at 31000 feet. When 007 itself called FSS/IFSS the first time (see above) it asked for permission to climb to 33000 feet. Permission, of course was necessary because there might have been another plane flying at that altitude. FSS/IFSS wasn't in charge of air routing so had passed on this request to Anchorage ground control which...ignored it. After 82 full minutes, at 1606 (at which time the RC and 007 blips on the

Russian radar were merged) Anchorage called 015 and asked it if 007 still wanted to climb to 33000 feet. 015 said 007 had asked it to request permission for this ascent – again, why hadn't it passed on the request when made? – and Anchorage gave permission. Within seconds 015 called back to confirm 007 was ascending to 33000 feet.

And yet, according to the Soviet radio transcripts – which, remember, were intercepted and published by the Americans themselves, *not* by the Russians – the RC 135 and 007 were flying at the same height...26000 feet. And 007 then proceeded to enter Soviet airspace over Kamchatka at that same altitude, 26000 feet. Over Kamchatka it did climb, but only to 29500 feet. But, according to the request it had made via 015 and which Anchorage *so belatedly agreed*, over radio the USSR could be assumed to be monitoring, it was supposed to have been at 31000 feet and to be, at this time, climbing to 33000 feet.

But perhaps the Soviets were lying? Since they were directing their fighters on to the plane, attempting an interception, why would they lie to their own pilots and ground controllers? They needed the right altitude to be able to make an interception at all.

You know, I'm beginning to feel that somewhere during the time between NABIE and NEEVA, someone got in touch with Anchorage ground control and informed them that strange things might happen with 007 and they should do as told. Who could it possibly be, do you think? Martians, maybe?

At this time – going only by flying time and reported position of 007 – Anchorage ground control was supposed to hand 007 over to Narita Airport (Japan) ground control. At 1612 Anchorage called Narita and handed over charge, even though it had not itself been in contact with 007 since the false waypoint report at Bethel almost two and a half hours earlier.

007 entered the Soviet Aerospace Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) near Kamchatka at 1620. It was a 100 kilometre zone from the coastline in which all unidentified air traffic was liable to be intercepted, and was marked as Prohibited Airspace. According to the USSR, they now attempted to contact 007 on radio, but got no response. Yet, after all this time silent, 007 now – at 1623 – suddenly radioed...once again...FSS/IFSS and made a radio check. Let's repeat once again that FSS/IFSS was not only *not* the correct authority for 007 to contact, it had specifically asked 007 *not* to contact it.

At 1630, 007 crossed the Kamchatka coast. By now it should have had Soviet fighters buzzing all around it, but for some strange reason this did not happen. Johnson speculates the possible reasons – ranging from simple Soviet incompetence to US radar jamming operations to the misdirection about 007's altitude changes, which might have made the interceptors reach the wrong height. That there were interceptors in the air is not denied by any side (Wikipedia says one MiG 23 and three SU 15s were scrambled; Johson says the figure was "four MiG 23s and SU 15s" which "were scrambled at 1637, by which time 007 was already 50 miles inland"), but somehow they did not find 007 at all. This was a serious failure on the Soviet part, and which might have led in considerable part to the shootdown to come. The failure to

intercept 007 over Kamchatka would have hardened the determination to make sure it didn't get away a second time once it re-entered Soviet airspace over Sakhalin, as we will see in the next section.

For 38 minutes, 007 overflew Kamchatka, with its naval bases and highly significant military installations, with total impunity. Not only did the fighters not find it, SA 2 anti-aircraft batteries were (Johnson says, quoting another source) ordered to shoot it down but could not get a firm radar lock. According to Johnson, later US transcripts of Soviet conversations over Kamchatka specifically referred to the SA 2 batteries being ordered to "shoot down the RC 135", proof that at this time the USSR had no idea of the kind of plane intruding on their airspace. Because the SA 2/3 system required three radars to lock on a target – one to find it, one to get the position and range, and one to direct the missile on to it – unless they all worked properly, the missile had no chance of finding the target. Much more sophisticated missiles did exist in the Soviet arsenal, but, as I said, they weren't given to the PVO in the far east.

In 1989, a Soviet PVO pilot, Aleksandr Zuyev, defected to Turkey with a MiG 29. He later wrote a very highly coloured book, *Fulcrum*, which I have read. The book is mostly vainglorious trash; Zuyev openly bends over backwards to please his new Western masters on the one hand while trying to prove himself some kind of Rambo figure with the other. But about Kamchatka he says that Arctic storms had knocked out Soviet radars ten days previously and this was why 007 was not intercepted over the peninsula. He then goes on to claim that it was to *hide this fact* that evil Soviet generals had the plane shot down over Sakhalin. Defector accounts, even when not so transparently self-serving, can't be trusted, but it is possible that this is the reason 007 was not intercepted. The other possibilities also exist, and in fact are more likely, since it seems not very credible that storms could knock out so many radars as to seriously dislocate coverage, and that they wouldn't have been repaired in ten days. Remember that this was a high-security zone with a heavy military presence. One can't ask Zuyev questions on this subject, because he is now *the late* unlamented Zuyev, having been killed in a crash in 2001.

007 left Kamchatka's airspace – without making any mention of the frenzied aerial activity around it – at 1707. All this time, remember, its VHF radio was somehow unable to contact anyone except for either going through 015 or making radio checks. Now suddenly, exactly one minute after leaving Soviet airspace, it called Narita ground control at Tokyo to report it had just crossed waypoint NIPPI, having made up two minutes (as I said earlier) on its lost time.

Quite naturally, this was another lie. 007 was then 180 miles north of NIPPI. And I don't suppose I have to repeat all the instruments and checks Captain Chun would have had to miss to be unaware where he exactly was. You know it by now as well as I do.

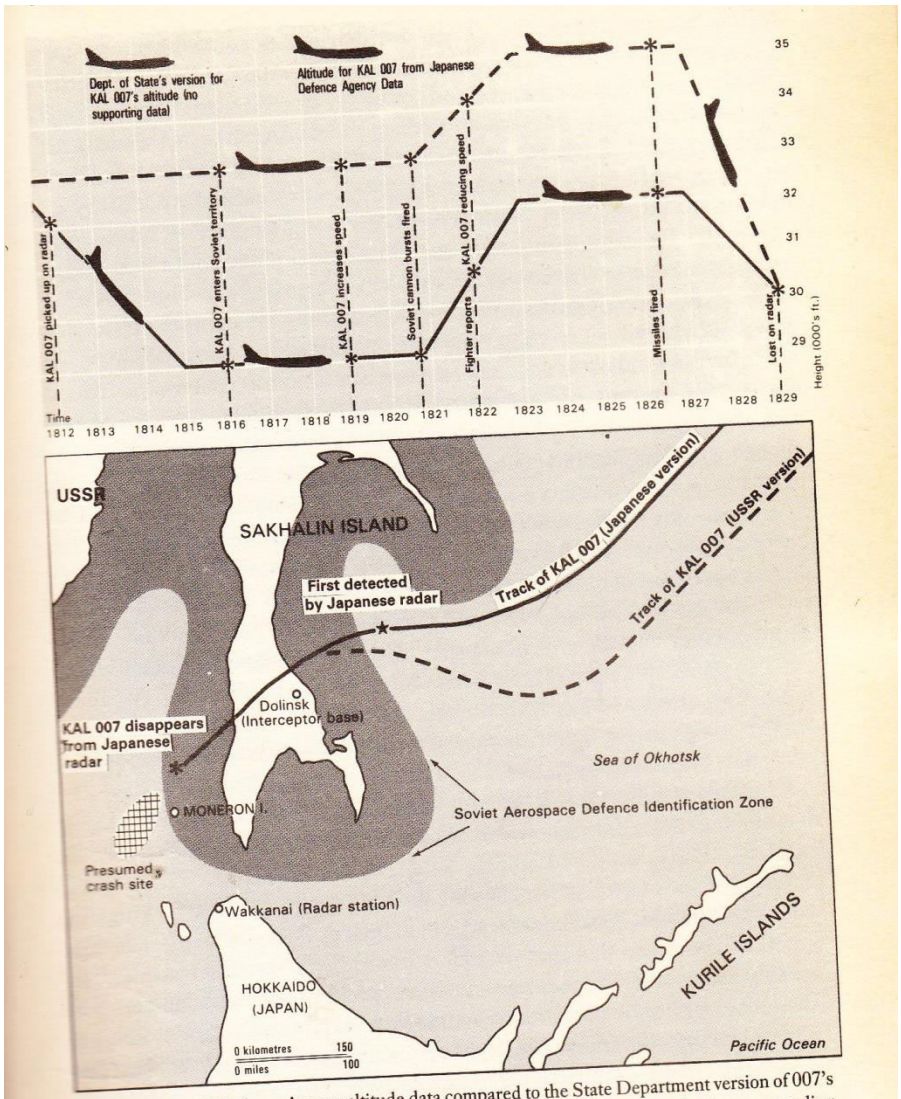
All this time, remember, 007 had not used its VHF radio to contact Anchorage, though 015, which was allegedly flying close behind it, could do so with no problem at all. Now, suddenly, within the space of three minutes, from 1708 to 1710, 007 contacted Narita no fewer than six times...on a VHF radio which was suddenly working perfectly again.

And then, as it flew over the Sea of Okhotsk towards Sakhalin, it fell silent once more.

Section 4: Sakhalin and shootdown.

007 had successfully evaded Soviet air defences for 38 minutes over Kamchatka, but it was a totally different matter to avoid them over Sakhalin, since by now the PVO would be fully alerted and ready. Now something happened that is utterly, totally impossible to explain in any terms whatsoever except a deliberate decision. As 007 flew over the Sea of Okhotsk, the Soviets would normally be expected to assume that 007 would – if it was an innocent gone astray – continue on a straight line towards Sakhalin. If it were a deliberate intrusion over Kamchatka, one might expect it to be headed for safety, in which case it would turn towards the south-east to miss Sakhalin altogether. According to Johnson the Soviets catered to this possibility, and scrambled fighters from a base in the Kuril Islands to cover this route. But instead of doing either, 007 made a turn to the *north-west* – effectively taking it deeper into Soviet territory over Sakhalin.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that this turn happened. There is no doubt, because by now 007 was being tracked, not only by Soviet and US radars, but by the Japanese radar and electronic eavesdropping post on Wakkanai. This radar's recordings, like the Soviet recordings, were later made public in an International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) investigation which I will be talking about in due course; the Wikipedia article cites this investigation repeatedly but omits, not altogether astonishingly, all the important points. Both Soviet and Japanese recordings agree that this turn happened, differing only to the sharpness of the turn – something that could be explained in terms of the relative distances from the two radar stations and the angles of the radio beams. But both say quite unequivocally that it happened.



2(a) Japanese Self-Defence Agency altitude data compared to the State Department version of 007's altitude changes in the last moments of its flight. 007 told its ground controller that it was ascending from 33,000 to 35,000 ft.

2(b) The two versions of 007's turn over Sakhalin. The thin line depicts 007's course as viewed by the Japanese radar station at Wakkanai, the thick line its course as reported by Soviet radar. 007 made no mention of a turn to its ground controller: despite the differences in the two tracks, the all-important fact is that both authorities concur that there was a turn. *Sources*: D. Pearson, 'The Facts of 007', *New York Review of Books*, 26 September 1985; Duncan Campbell, 'What Really Happened to KE007?', *New Statesman*, 26 April 1985; Clarence A. Robinson Jr., 'US Says Soviet Knew Korean Air Lines 747 was Commercial Flight', *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 12 September 1983.

This turn is totally inexplicable as an accident. It could not happen owing to an INS error. It could not have happened by random chance. It could not have happened unless Chun deliberately caused it to happen – and there is absolutely no way it can be explained away, even as a deliberate move, except as an attempt to wrong-foot the defences by heading in a direction opposite to the one they would expect.

These defences were already active. Johnson has the Soviet fighters scrambling at 1742, while 007 was still far offshore – this time the PVO did not repeat the blunders of their Kamchatka colleagues and wait till

007 was already well inland before sending out the planes. The fighters flew out to sea, in an attempt to intercept 007 at the edge of the ADIZ. At approximately the same time, according to the American pilot, Allardyce, referred to above, 007 again speeded up – to about 0.9 Mach like 015 did earlier, enough to set off the Mach buzzer in its cockpit. In case this speeding up was accidental, one can't imagine the reason the cockpit crew didn't slow down to a safe speed immediately – unless, of course, they had switched off the buzzer, like 015 earlier probably did.

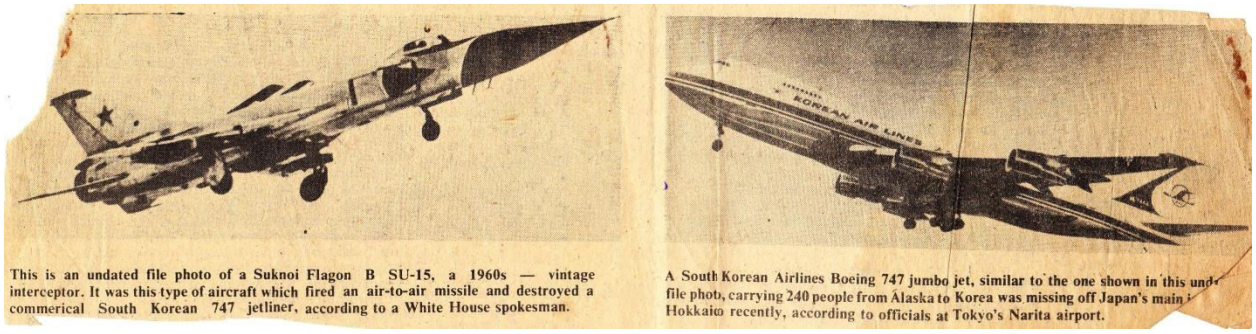
While the fighters from the Kuril air base covered the escape routes to the south, other fighters had already begun tracking 007. According to Johnson, these were two MiG 23s and one SU 15 from PVO's Dolinsk air base. According to Wikipedia, there were three SU 15s from Dolinsk air base and one MiG 23 from Smirnykh air base. That there was at least one MiG 23, No 163, is clear from the radio transcripts of the Soviet pilots' conversations, but from this point on a new and important actor was to enter the stage: Major Gennady Osipovich, flying an SU 15 TM, code number 805[6].

Before we go on to talk about what happened next, we need to take a moment to talk about this man and the plane he was flying. For some reason, Johnson consistently misidentifies Osipovich as Major Vassily Kasmin. Not only in the text does he do this, but also in the illustration section of the book, where he has a photo of Osipovich being interviewed – anonymously, he says – by Soviet TV. Since he does not cite his source for this misidentification, it's not possible for me to say where he got the name from. However, the man in the photograph is without a doubt Gennady Osipovich – who, equally without a doubt, was the pilot in the cockpit of 805. From this point on, I will therefore call 805's pilot by his real name, though Johnson invariably calls him "Major Kasmin".

This is the photo from the Soviet TV programme, reproduced by Johnson, showing Osipovich's interview. In his book he captions the photo as "Major Kasmin".

There is also a gap in the information about the plane Osipovich was flying. Johnson refers to it simply as an SU 15, and in the illustration section he publishes a photo which is the same as one I have, in a newspaper clipping from 1983 (yes, I have clippings dating back to 1983!). This photo, from the Associated Press, is captioned (presumably by Johnson, since it's not the same as the caption on my clipping) "A Sukhoi SU 15 'Flagon' of the type piloted by Major Kasmin."

Here is my clipping from 1983. The left half of the clipping, the one showing the SU 15, is the photo – rotated by 180 degrees – that Johnson posts in his book, calling it the type of plane piloted by "Kasmin":



While 'Flagon' was the NATO reporting name of the entire SU 15 series[7], the plane in the photo is definitely *not* the type piloted by Osipovich. The photo clearly shows a pair of raised engine hatch covers on the top of the fuselage, which identifies it as an SU 15 T-58 VD, a short-take off and landing (STOL) version known to NATO as 'Flagon B', of which only one was constructed in the 1960s as a technology

demonstrator. 805 was a much later SU 15 TM, 'Flagon G', which model entered service in 1971, and was by the 1980s the only major subtype, barring trainers, still in service.

This is an illustration of Osipovich's SU 15:

Печально знаменитый **Су-15ТМ**, на котором 1 сентября 1983 года летчик Осипович сбил Боинг-747 авиакомпании KAL. Сахалин, ПВО ДВО

Is this important? Actually, it is. The American Secretary of State, George Schultz, would initially argue (before the US changed its story, as they did, as we'll see, multiple times) that Osipovich could not possibly have – as he'd said – fired warning shots at 007 because the SU 15 did not *have* cannon. This was certainly true of the early versions, which could carry only two R98 missiles for use against large targets like bombers. However, though Wikipedia didn't exist in those days, Schultz could have simply checked up *Jane's Combat Aircraft*, which would have informed him that the TM carried not just the two R98s, but could *also* carry two or four R60 short range missiles for use against enemy fighters, and *in addition* could mount two 23 mm cannon pods below the fuselage. Later on, US government spokesmen admitted this was so.

From what happened in the ten or so minutes after Osipovich took position behind 007, it's difficult to avoid the conclusion that he was a pilot of fairly exceptional ability and temperament. He first sighted 007 when it was still some way from the Sakhalin coast; this alone must have taken some skill, for it was still completely dark, and though the moon was a little less than half full, weather conditions were cloudy with gusting wind, "mostly overcast low cloud with scattered medium and high clouds". Later, Reagan was to claim it was a clear night and the moon was half full. Either he was deliberately lying or whoever had written the claim for him to make was deliberately lying. In any case, Osipovich was both fortunate and skilful to be able to find 007 visually at all.

The truth about the weather and light conditions was not something that only the Americans knew. Speaking to the media, General Goro Takeda, the former head of the Japanese Air Self Defence Force (that is, Air Force in all but name) and Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff, said:

“It was difficult for the Soviets to tell the kind of aircraft or where it had come from. I checked on how light it was at that altitude on the day of the tragedy...the incident occurred at 325 am, more than an hour and a half before sunrise...Self Defence Force members concur that at that hour there is only a faint glow on the horizon.”

Takeda said some other things, which we’ll get to later.

At 1805 Osipovich reported that he was taking up position behind “the intruder” at a heading of 240 degrees (this was the heading at which 007 had crossed over Kamchatka) at an altitude of 8000 metres. This, Johnson says, was 26250 feet, and would mean that if he was following “normal interception procedures” he would be flying somewhat lower than the target, so 007 would probably have been at 27000 feet or thereabouts.

Johnson does not explain why the interception procedure would require 805 to be lower than 007, but actually this is not a mystery. The Taifun M radar carried by the SU 15 TM, while a considerable improvement over radars carried by earlier SU 15 models, was not capable of “look down/shoot down” interception; if at a higher altitude, it could lose its quarry in the reflections of radar waves from terrain features below. To be certain of interception the plane had to be at the same altitude or below the target to illuminate it on radar against the clear background of the sky. Besides, assuming that the intruder was a bomber or large spy plane like the RC 135 – and at this point the Soviets were of the idea that the target was probably an RC 135 – an approach from behind and below would allow the missile to strike the target in its most vulnerable spots, the engines and tail control surfaces.

Let me at this point remind the reader that as per the official story, which is also uncritically reported by Wikipedia, 007 should at this time have been at 33000 feet. Again, since the Soviet radars, ground controllers and pilots would need to report the correct altitudes to effect an interception, there is absolutely no reason why they should be lying to each other.

Again, at this time, the Soviets began experiencing acute problems with their radar. There were three separate radar stations, at Karnaval, Deputat and Trikotazh, guiding the interceptors. Osipovich visually (“Am observing”, he reported) located 007 at 1805; as I said, he was a pilot of exceptional skill. However, he did not pick it up on his own cockpit radar screen until 1812, six minutes later, when he reported that he was “observing it visually and seeing it on the screen.” One of the MiG 23s – or the *only* MiG 23, depending on whether you believe Johnson or Wikipedia – reported at 1817 that “Deputat is observing me,” suggesting that till this time Deputat couldn’t even illuminate its own fighter. It then said that “Karnaval does not observe” and asked 805 whether it could “see” the target. Assuming that the defector was telling the truth about the Kamchatka radars, this obviously didn’t translate into the Sakhalin radars *also* being damaged by storms; the same authority, Pearson, cited by Johnson about the meeting of the RC 135 and 007 says that this could only happen due to jamming by US aircraft and ground and ship stations. Not surprisingly, the Soviets responded by illuminating their entire radar chain in this area –

exactly the thing the US had been attempting to provoke since the discovery of the giant radar array back in July.

There is no doubt at all that the US was watching the Soviet radar reaction; later on, Ernst Volkman, editor of the journal *Defense* (sic) *Science*, said:

"As a result of the KAL incident United States Intelligence received a bonanza the likes of which they have never received in their lives. Reason: because of the tragic incident it managed to turn on just about every single Soviet electromagnetic transmission over a period of four hours and an area of approximately 7000 square miles...what one person has described to me as a Christmas tree...(e)verything you could possibly ever hope for."

Another American intelligence writer, James Bamford, confirmed: "In terms of electronic intelligence the violation was an intelligence treasure chest."

This also means that – as ought to be clear to the reader – US electronics observations platforms were watching the Soviet east very, very closely, and that in turn means that they could not possibly have been unaware that 007 was not just heading into lethal danger but was being stalked by Soviet interceptors. Yet the US did not try to warn 007, or to contact the Russians and inform them that they were following a civilian aeroplane. *They did absolutely nothing at all*.

Not even Wikipedia can wish that little fact away.

There is something else surprising/astonishing/amazing/remarkable that 007 did during this flight; it switched its transponder, which sent out a radio code identifying itself, from the normal airliner code to "squawking" code SSR 1300. This was a bizarre move, which also can't be explained away as an accident, and which would normally be thought of as counterproductive; why on earth would 007 want to be *not* seen on radio as a passenger plane? Wouldn't that be putting itself in unnecessary danger? But let's assume that 007 was on a mission, shielded by electronic jamming, to penetrate Soviet airspace in order to trigger radar defences, and see if this makes sense.

Suppose that 007 sent out a code identifying itself as a civilian aeroplane, and there was no radar jamming. Soviet fighters would assume it was a passenger plane, and even if they were flown to intercept it, the whole defence system wouldn't be triggered to locate a passenger plane that was probably just straying out of its way. However, an unknown code, a *unique* code, would not just alarm the Soviets, who would not know the plane was a passenger aircraft, it would also help immediately identify 007 to the US intelligence platforms watching from offshore. 007 wasn't the only aeroplane around at this time, you'll

recall; apart from the Soviet fighters and the US' own reconnaissance planes, there was also 015, plus presumably other – innocent – aircraft flying this heavily travelled piece of air.

In the speculative situation I've outlined, does the transponder code make sense now?

We will now get back to 805 following 007. As I said, Osipovich took up station behind 007 at 1805, and announced its heading as 240 degrees. Two minutes after this, 007 began the turn I mentioned, and 805 announced that he was turning to 260 degrees to keep the target in sight. This meant that 805 was following 007 in a turn to the north; a turn confirmed, as I'd said, by the Japanese radar station at Wakkanai. "Affirmative," Osipovich confirmed, "it has turned...the target is 80 degrees to my left." Yet, thirty seconds later, the "target" was back at its old heading of 240 degrees, which meant it had turned to the south again, the whole manoeuvre taking it on a parallel track to its old course, but deeper in Soviet territory. As Johnson observes, not only would the Russians assume that this was a deliberate attempt at evasion, it's just about impossible to think of it in any terms *except* a deliberate attempt at evasion.

At this point, it is important to mention something: Johnson, writing in 1986, presented the Soviet conversation's transcripts as released by the US, which claimed it did not have the ground controllers' messages to the pilots, only the pilots' responses. The excuse made by the US was that they were listening in from stations below the horizon line, and only the pilots (being above the horizon) could be picked up by their radios. But Johnson claimed that this was another deliberate lie meant to obscure the fact that the US was actually closely monitoring the area from aeroplanes and also, as we'll discuss later, a surveillance satellite. The Japanese, in fact, later claimed that they had the transcripts of conversations from the ground controllers to the fighters, and US surveillance capabilities were far ahead of those of the Japanese. The Japanese then, under evident American pressure, suddenly reversed themselves and announced that they had no transcripts of the ground controllers' messages at all.

Years after the event, in 1993, the transcripts of the ground controllers' alleged conversation with the pilots was released by the ICAO[8]. I say "alleged", because these transcripts that I've seen seem to skip the first part of the interception – including mention of the turn – completely, and because there are discrepancies between what Osipovich really said and what these transcripts claim he said. Also, the primary function of the ICAO seems to have been to avoid assigning any blame to anyone, which is also a topic for later discussion in this article. However, it's fairly clear from the transcript that the Soviet ground controllers were anxious to identify whether their quarry was a passenger plane, that they were *not* aware that it was a passenger plane, that they were aware of the possibility that it could be an RC 135, and that they were aware that this was the same aircraft which had flown over Kamchatka.

At this point, the USSR claimed, the fighters attempted to contact 007. They, it says, flashed their lights, waggled their wings, and attempted to contact it on radio on the international frequency of 121.5 MHz. The US was later, in the person of Reagan himself, to claim that Soviet aeroplanes did not carry radios capable of broadcasting at 121.5 MHz because "they were afraid of their pilots defecting". How that logic was supposed to work, I certainly couldn't tell you, but the Soviets responded by taking an international

team to a PVO air base and let them see for themselves that SU 15s and MiG 23s most certainly *did* have radios that could broadcast on 121.5 MHz.

Even according to the US transcript – which was released in dribs and drabs in the days following the shootdown, as we'll see – Osipovich is heard saying to his controller that "the target isn't responding to the call." The US version of the transcript initially said that he had said "the call on IFF," and only belatedly corrected it. There are more than excellent reasons to think that the original "mistranslation" was a deliberate error, as we'll find out.

What is this IFF, anyway? As Clubb says,

"The IFF ("Identification: Friend or Foe") (is) a transponder which automatically responds when queried by a signal from air traffic controllers, giving the aircraft's tail numbers, airline name and flight number. And ... a veteran US Air Force pilot (said): "Whenever you're off course and you don't want the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] to know it, you turn off IFF." "[9]

The US said initially that the Soviet fighter had not attempted to contact 007 at all. Once their own transcript disproved this, they said that it had said that it had attempted to contact it on IFF, and that this would have been useless since the KAL Boeing had no IFF. This was untrue on two levels:

1.The Soviet transcript at no point said that the pilot had attempted to call "on IFF". That was a deliberate insertion by the US.

2.Actually, KAL 007 *did* have an IFF. All planes flying on this route did, and it was standard practice to leave it on, seeing as it was right adjacent to highly militarily significant territory.

What this means is that *either* 007 had deliberately turned off IFF because it was off course and wanted nobody to know, *or* the Soviet contact had not been on IFF – in which case it was on normal radio frequencies – *or* both.

Also, in the dribs and drabs of transcript that the US put out, it alleged that 805 had reported that the intruder's strobe lights were flashing. This was put out while the USSR was claiming that 007 had no lights flashing at all, in contravention of normal practice. Whether the Soviets were telling the truth or not, the actual transcript had Osipovich saying, simply, "It is flashing". What "it" was he didn't say; it could easily be his own plane's lights, which he said he flashed in order to try and contact the intruder.

In any case, it is perfectly clear that the Soviets *did*, contrary to the initial American claims, try to contact 007. It is as totally undeniable – and in fact those who claim that Chun was accidentally off course make no attempt to deny it – that 007 did not respond.

Now, while 007 did not respond to the Russians, it was certainly very active communicating *elsewhere*. The Soviets say that it was sending pulses of coded messages, and that may or may not be true. Even if we discount that, after maintaining radio silence for more than an hour – since its last transmission just after leaving Kamchatka – at 1815, two minutes after Osipovich told his ground controller that he could "see" it on his screen and was "locked on" – 007 called Narita airport on VHF. This proves without a doubt that its radio was working. It made no mention of being lost, or anyone attempting to contact it in any fashion; all it wanted was permission to make an altitude change, from 33000 feet to 35000 feet.

A minute after that, at 1816, 007 passed from the ADIZ into Soviet airspace. Since Sakhalin is narrow, it would probably only be over Soviet territory about ten minutes or so – during which time the Russians would have to decide what to do about it, and if necessary shoot it down. The pressure would have been maximum on Osipovich, the leader of the interceptors.

According to the Soviet account, Osipovich watched as the intruder flew almost directly over his own air base at Dolinsk, which was just south of the major Korsakov naval base, meaning that not only was it intruding over Soviet territory, it was *flying over the most important military installation* in that territory. He then fired his cannon past the intruder in warning bursts. As I have said, the US at first denied that this was even possible. When it became undeniable that it *was* possible, they reluctantly amended their transcripts to include references to "warning bursts". However, there is a controversy about the kind of ammunition he fired.

According to Osipovich's initial testimony, he fired four shells of tracers, each containing 30 rounds, making a grand total of 120 rounds of tracer fire "right by his nose". Tracers are clearly visible, especially in the darkness, and even the former Air Force pilot and US Senator John Glenn agreed that if tracers had actually been fired it was virtually impossible that 007 hadn't seen them. When reluctantly forced to admit that the Soviet pilot had used his cannons, the Americans then said that he must have used cannon shells, not tracers. Many years later, Osipovich (by then a retired lieutenant colonel) himself seemed to agree to this, stating that he had fired 243 rounds of cannon shells, "for all the good that did. They were armour piercing, not incendiary." This was in an interview he allegedly gave to *Izvestia* in 1991. As we shall see, he seemed to contradict himself yet *again* in an interview to the *New York Times* five years after that.

However, even if this was true, this does *not* let 007 off the hook, as Johnson said in his book. Osipovich, a fighter pilot who had never, of course, been in a 747 cockpit, would not have been aware of the fact, but

"...cannon shells would have been less visible but would still have made a great noise which 007 would have been bound to hear. (In a 747 cockpit one can easily hear the engine noise of nearby passing planes, let alone shell bursts.)"

In the *New York Times* interview in 1996, Osipovich says clearly that the 007 pilot should have been at least able to see his cannon flashes. So there's that.

Now there occurred a radio exchange that is as interesting as it is pertinent.

At 1820 and ten seconds, Narita gave 007 permission to increase altitude from 33000 feet to 35000. Ten seconds after that, 1820:20, 007 confirmed that it was leaving 33000 feet and climbing to 35000 feet. Yet, a minute and twenty seconds after this, at 1821:40, 805 told his ground control that the target was at 10000 metres, 32800 feet. Either it had climbed during the time since 805 made the first report, or Johnson's initial estimate of 27000 feet was wrong. Even assuming that the initial height that Johnson estimated, 27000 feet, was wrong, it meant that 007 had *not* climbed to 35000 feet even after announcing that it was doing so.

I would like to remind the reader once again that all this is contained in the transcripts released by the *Americans* – it can't be brushed off as "Soviet propaganda".

But in any case, we don't have to rely on the Soviet transcripts for proof. The Japanese radar at Wakkanai, which I mentioned, also confirmed that 007 never climbed to 35000 feet. The radar's findings were presented to the Japanese Diet a year and a half later, in May 1985, and prove conclusively that 007 was lying, even to the ground controller at Narita. At the time the Boeing claimed to be at 33000 feet it was actually a thousand feet lower, at 32000 feet. Then – after having announced a climb to 35000 feet – the airliner actually slowed speed and *dived down* to 29000 feet, at which point 805 fired cannon shells, or tracers, past it. From this altitude, it then reaccelerated and climbed back to 32000 feet (Wikipedia claims it *slowed down* as it ascended). Osipovich, in his later interviews, said that the intruder lowered flaps and slowed down with the intention of making him – in his much faster supersonic fighter – overshoot. In fact, this almost happened (according to the transcripts, he was telling his controller, with some irritation, "How can I chase it? I'm already abeam of the target") and it was – once again – his considerable flying skills that led to his being able to drop back and behind the target, which was by now headed out to sea again, towards safety.

It will not be surprising to the reader to be told that the Wikipedia article makes no mention of this lying at all, and just repeats the claim that 007 was at 35000 feet. It could not have even remotely made its predetermined case that 007 was an innocent victim of navigational error otherwise.

Did this lying on 007's part, which as we have seen was confirmed by Wakkanai radar, have a point? Let's once again assume that 007 was on a spying mission. Let us also assume that the pilot was aware that he was being followed by Soviet fighters. He would be only logical in believing that the Soviets would be listening in on his communications. Therefore, if he announced a climb, it would be expected that they would think that he would actually be climbing and direct their fighters to climb to the altitude he'd announced, while he *dived* instead. It was not just evasion tactics, it was the kind of evasion tactics RC 135s regularly carried out when tracked by Soviet fighters off the Siberian coast. Obviously, Chun could not have got away with it indefinitely, but he did not *need* to get away with it indefinitely – just long enough to escape into international airspace, which was by that time just about a minute or so away. And Chun, an ace former fighter pilot, knew all about evasion tactics.

In the so-called transcripts later released a decade later, there is no mention of the ground controllers' referring to intercepted communications from 007, which makes some of Osipovich's comments during his flight difficult to understand. However, if – as Johnson does – one juxtaposes his part of the conversation with an intercepted communication between 007 and Narita, it becomes much more comprehensible. For example, after 007 announces it's climbing, Osipovich can be heard telling his controllers which altitude it's flying at and its orientation from him – unnecessary unless he's just been informed that it's indicated a change of course or altitude.

To Osipovich's ground controllers, the time had come to take the final step to prevent the intruder getting away. They ordered Osipovich to shoot it down. But, as the major himself said later, cited in an interview he allegedly gave to *Izvestia* in 1991, and which Wikipedia cites not directly but from an American book, that is, at second hand:

"But how? With shells? I had already expended 243 rounds. Ram it? I had always thought of that as poor taste. Ramming is the last resort. Just in case, I had already completed my turn and was coming down on top of him. Then, I had an idea. I dropped below him about 2,000 meters... afterburners. Switched on the missiles and brought the nose up sharply. Success! I have a lock on."

"Now I will try rockets," Osipovich said. 805 carried, as I said, two R98 (known to NATO as AA3 Anab) missiles. The R98s were optimised for use against large targets like bombers, and were meant to be used in pairs. One had a radar-homing warhead, which locked on to the target's radar image. The other had an infra-red homing warhead, which followed the target's engine heat signature. Normal practice was that the IR was fired first, followed by the radar homing missile, so that the former did not lock on to the latter's own rocket engine heat.

Here's a typical American reproduction of the shooting down, totally inaccurate, of course, as to all factors. Note the fact that the sky is clear, fairly light, and that three fighters are following close behind. This is the kind of fabricated propaganda that is calculated to quickly influence people of limited intelligence and mayfly attention spans:

“I have executed launch,” Osipovich announced, as the missiles streaked at 2.5 times the speed of sound from below his wings.

Two seconds after Osipovich pressed the button on his joystick, there was a huge explosion. “The target is destroyed,” he said.

Later, this line, “The target is destroyed”, would be used by the US government as “proof” of the “brutality” and “savagery” of the Soviets; a bestial cry of triumph it was called. Actually, it was a perfectly normal report, used in exercises and training as well, by all sides.

This is from a Russian source, but is only a slightly less fanciful depiction of the shooting down. Note the full moon and the burning plane. At the altitude 007 was, there is too little oxygen for anything to burn.

But was the target actually destroyed?

Among the many, many strange things that happened so far on the flight, the last moments of 007 must rank among the strangest. Even the time of the shootdown is disputed. According to the Americans, it was at 1826:20, when 007 would have been, though in Soviet airspace, out to sea. According to the USSR, it was at 1824, when 007 would still have been over Sakhalin. There is no way of reconciling these two times. Guess which one Wikipedia prefers?

I have said that 805 fired two missiles – and Osipovich confirmed as much, to his ground controllers, moments later. (“Yes, both.”) According to Johnson, the radar guided one missed – probably due to the jamming. The other, he avers, must have struck one of the engines, where it would have gone due to the heat of the exhaust, and exploded. However, actual hitting of the target by an anti-aircraft shell or missile is long since obsolete; since the late Second World War, anti-aircraft ordnance has been “radio proximity fused”, that is, it explodes when it gets within a certain distance of the target, said distance depending on the amount of explosive carried by the warhead and the sphere within which it can cause damage.

Wikipedia doesn’t say whether one or both missiles exploded, but agrees that the radio proximity fuse would have caused detonation at fifty metres behind the aircraft, destroying hydraulic lines and control surfaces. It then gives a detailed description of the plane oscillating upwards and downwards, until the

crew managed to regain a measure of control, and it began a long shallow dive down to the surface of the sea, in a spiral. The source of this is the analysis of the plane's flight data recorder, by ICAO and ten years after the incident, in 1993. Later on in this account I'll tell you why both the flight data recorder and the cockpit voice recorder of 007 can be discounted.

Was that what really happened?

At this time, 007 was being monitored by both the Japanese radar at Wakkanai and by US military radars. Surprisingly enough, they give dramatically different accounts of what happened to the Boeing. Wakkanai said 007 fell quickly from the radar screen, vanishing at three minutes after the (American-given) missile strike time at 1826. Thus, it had vanished from the screen at 1829 and could be presumed to have crashed shortly after. The Americans had a separate facility at Wakkanai, and claimed that they had been following 007 without knowing what it was. As incredible as this sounds, even more incredible is the fact that though the US had this facility at Wakkanai, they claimed that they got their radar data from the Japanese facility. If they did, the two accounts should be identical, right?

Of course, they aren't.

The Americans, unlike the Japanese, claim a much, much slower descent – so that it took all of twelve minutes to vanish from the screen, in a fairly controlled dive. It finally, they aver, disappeared off the screen only at 1838. This would mean that the passengers and crew had a much more prolonged and painful death; but also, it would mean that the plane would have crashed much further along from where, as it turned out, it actually did, just off the island of Moneron. When this discrepancy came up, the US "adjusted" its data to claim that the plane went down in a spiral, so that it would finally come down at the spot where it finally did crash.

Is it altogether an overwhelming surprise that the ICAO report ten years later totally backed up the US version?

Obviously, I don't accept the US version on anything at all on this episode, but let's examine why the Japanese version is much more likely to be the truth.

First, there were witnesses below. This was the Japanese trawler *Chidori Maru No 58*, which was about 19 nautical miles off Moneron. As to what a Japanese trawler was doing so close to Soviet territory, there was nothing strange about it. The USSR, as a gesture of friendship, allowed Japanese trawlers from Wakkanai to fish in Soviet waters. After the shootdown, when the Japanese government, under US pressure, adopted a bellicose tone towards the USSR, the Russians retaliated by stopping this practice, so the fishermen ended up being squeezed between the two sides for no fault of their own.

This is what the trawler crew reported, according to Johnson: at about “three o’clock in the morning” – that is, about 800 UTC – they heard a loud bang. They then saw, two or three seconds later, a “glowing orange coloured expanding fireball,” which lasted, they said, for five or six seconds, and then was followed by a second bang and a second fireball, not as bright as the first one. A five or six second long fireball is much too big for a missile explosion. If we accept this account at all, the only logical conclusion – two explosions, two fireballs – is that both missiles exploded, one after the other, and resulted in a massive detonation. After that there is no possibility that the plane could make a gradual, spiralling dive as per the American claim.

(Wikipedia gives a slightly different version, which mentions only one unnamed crewman and describes the noise of an unseen low flying plane and the smell of “aviation fuel”; it does not explain how a trawlerman would know what aviation fuel smells like.)

But perhaps we shouldn’t accept the account of the trawler crew, who, after all, were not trained witnesses and gave a time which was 24 to 26 minutes earlier than the putative time of the missile strike anyway? What else have we got?

The *second* bit of evidence is the alleged action of the crew. According to the ICAO-account-based Wikipedia article, the plane – after the initial violent oscillations – came back under control at around 16400 feet and flew level for about five minutes before making a spiral descent over Moneron. According to this same account, the missile explosion had punctured the aircraft skin and caused explosive decompression of the passenger compartments, forcing the crew to don oxygen masks. What would you have expected the crew to do under such circumstances?

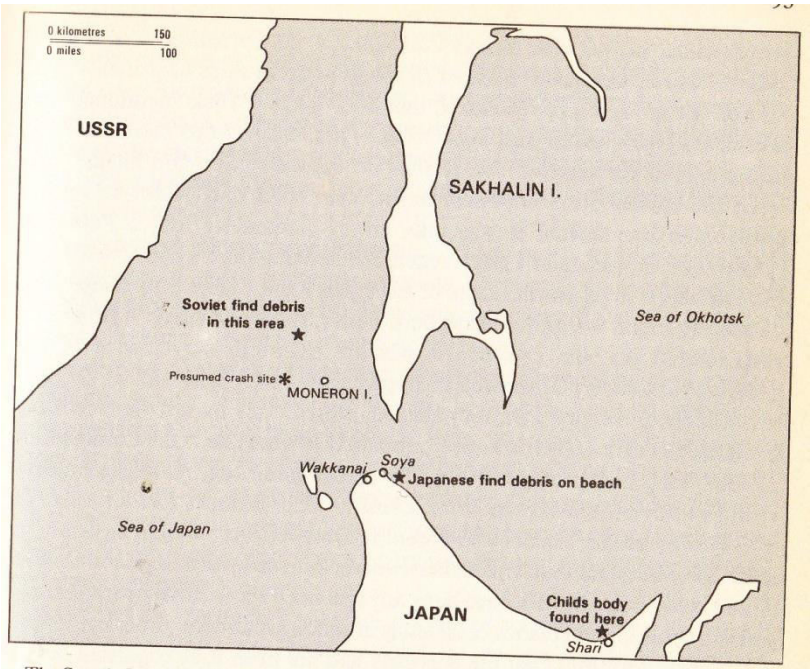
The first thing they’d do was call for help – on the international distress frequency – by saying “Mayday” three times. However, they did *not* do this. According to the ground control at Narita, co-pilot Son Dong-Hui called Narita 38 full seconds after the missile strike, without mentioning any explosion at all. He then allegedly waited a few seconds and then shouted that explosive decompression was taking place and the plane was descending to 10000 feet. If this is so, it’s very interesting, because according to the American account (and Wikipedia) the plane *did not* descend to 10000 feet, but levelled out at 16400 feet and flew level for five minutes at that altitude. Why it would do such a thing is totally incomprehensible if explosive decompression had actually occurred; the procedure would be to try and get down to breathable air, ten thousand feet or lower, as quickly as possible.

Furthermore, the same ICAO report from 1993 so lovingly repeated by Wikipedia has the transcript of the alleged conversation of the cockpit crew after the missile hit; the co-pilot was said to have stated twice to the pilot “engines normal, sir.” This meant that they were perfectly aware that something was wrong (they could hardly have been unaware of this) and yet did not attempt to make a Mayday call or try and get down to 10000 feet, even though there’s a mention later of “Attention emergency descent”.

Johnson, at this point, makes an interesting analogy. Two years later, in 1985, an Air India Boeing 747 was blown up over the Atlantic near Ireland by a Khalistani terrorist bomb. The plane was flying at about the same altitude as 007, and took about the same time – three minutes – to crash to the sea as in the Japanese Wakkanai account. However, the cockpit voice recorder, after the bomb explosion, got almost nothing at all except what might be a "shout". Salim Jiwa, in *The Death Of Air India Flight 182*[10], gives a full transcript of the cockpit recordings of that occasion, and I have read it for myself, and, yes, Johnson is perfectly correct.

The *third* bit of evidence is the state of the wreckage. A Boeing 747 is a remarkably tough aeroplane, capable of flying even on one or two of its four engines. Even if the crew could not, for whatever reason, fly it on in a straight line, even if it went down in a slow spiral, it would have come down on the sea relatively intact; the wreckage would be expected to be in a few large pieces, and the corpses recovered to be mostly intact. Instead – and there is no doubt about this at all – the wreckage was shattered and scattered over a *very* wide area of ocean, and the corpses recovered were badly mangled...as they would have been if there were a massive explosion in the air, and probably *high up* in the air.

Note the scatter of wreckage in this map:



9 The Search Operation after the shoot-down.

What might have caused this explosion? There were suggestions that there might have been a bomb placed on board, to blow up the plane by remote control in case it was shot down, in order to destroy

incriminating evidence. There was a precedent for this: the 1st May 1960 downing of Francis Gary Powers, flying a U2 spyplane, over Sverdlovsk in the Urals. Powers' plane had been fitted with a bomb which he was supposed to trigger in case of an emergency before ejecting from the aircraft. Quite rightly suspecting that the bomb was intended to blow him to pieces, he made no attempt to trigger it. He also manually bailed out from the plane instead of using the ejection seat, again rightly suspecting that it was rigged to blow him up rather than blow him out of the aircraft. Then he threw away a poisoned coin he'd been given to kill himself with...and that was why he lived to be captured and tell the tale.[11]

Yes, there might have been a bomb on board 007, but Johnson dismisses the possibility for reasons we'll discuss later; just as we'll discuss why *I* don't discount it. The alternative explanation, of course, the simple one, is that the missile strikes simply blew the fuselage to pieces in mid air.

There is a *fourth*, and ancillary, bit of evidence. The enormous explosion that Osipovich saw, as he reported that the target was destroyed, was not matched by an immediate effect on the radar screens of the Soviets below. They could not decide if the target had actually been destroyed. According to the transcripts, they ordered the MiG 23/s to search the area and to shoot down the intruder if it had not already been destroyed. However, the MiG 23 or 23s, despite the type's vastly superior electronics compared to the SU 15's, found nothing at all.

If the 747 had been, as alleged, by now flying level at 16000 feet towards Moneron, this is frankly extremely difficult to believe. However, it is not at all difficult to believe if it had blown up in mid air.

Still, there is the matter of the radio report that 007 most undoubtedly made to Narita *after* the craft had to all evidence blown up. How to explain that?

Johnson suggests ingeniously that the report did not come from 007 at all – that some other source, pretending to be 007, was actually communicating with Narita in the name of 007 while the Boeing itself was maintaining radio silence. He speculates that this source had begun a routine call to Narita and then suddenly become aware that something had happened to 007, whereupon he yelled, in a panic, "Delta...1010." In Johnson's scenario, this would go to explain the discrepancy between the American and Japanese versions of the crash; the Americans had to come out with some way of explaining away this last radio transmission, and having a long, spiralling descent gave them the way out of that. Both Delta and 1010 were *military*, not civilian, designations; but then all three cockpit crewmen were old military hands, and I think it's perfectly possible they might revert to habit in an emergency. This must be balanced against the rest of the evidence; there isn't really a way to reconcile them.

In any case, 007 was destroyed. At the time of being shot down, it was an amazing 587 kilometres off course – more so than any other plane in the history of civil aviation, before or since.[12]

The action in the air was over; the propaganda wars were about to begin.

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Part 4: The Aftermath.

Section 1: Narita and Gimpo.

007's last signal – real or spoofed, whichever it was – to Narita had been made at 1827, and had mentioned "explosive decompression" and "rapid descent to 10000 feet." Obviously, something had gone badly wrong. Also, at this very exact moment, 1827, 007 was supposed to report from waypoint NOKKA compulsorily – but it did not. It was due to come into detection range of the civilian radar at Hakodate at 1834...but that didn't happen either.

As we've already seen at NABIE, even a two minute delay at reporting from a compulsory waypoint is an emergency, and that is without the other evidence of a major problem. However, for some...sigh...remarkable reason, Narita waited a full half hour before informing other Japanese civilian air control stations and the Japanese military that 007 was missing. Nor did the Japanese military apparently then contact its own radar at Wakkanai, which had a greater range than the civilian Hakodate radar, to see if they knew anything about 007. And then, Narita waited *another* half an hour before declaring an official alert over 007 – a full hour after losing contact with it. And even then, Narita Air Control never tried to contact either the KAL office *right there at Narita International Airport itself*, or Gimpo International Airport in Seoul where the plane was headed and where the relatives of the passengers were now waiting to pick them up, at all.

Yet another hour after this – 2030 – Narita finally phoned Khabarovsk (civilian) air control centre to find out if the Soviets knew anything about 007...something they could have done at *literally any time* since the shootdown. That is even assuming that they didn't know 007 was in Soviet airspace in the first place, in which case they could have called earlier to warn the Soviets that a passenger plane was astray. Khabarovsk didn't know anything but promised to check; within twenty minutes they replied that they had no information about 007. Also, the significance of this is apparently that someone had finally realised that – despite all the navigational aids – 007 might have ventured into Soviet territory.

And now, only now, two full hours later, Narita air control finally thought to contact KAL at all.

How do we explain all this?

There is only one explanation for this that I can think of, and that is, as at Anchorage, someone had contacted Narita and told them that strange things might happen with 007, and that they should do nothing unless contacted. And only after it was as certain as could be that 007 had been downed was permission given to do something. But, as I said, this is only what *I* can think of. Perhaps someone has an alternate explanation, in which case I should be glad to hear it.

There is more explaining away to be done about what happened next at Gimpo (Johnson calls it by its old transliteration, Kimpo). It was at 2020 that KAL offices at Tokyo, Seoul and Anchorage were finally told about the missing plane by Narita. By then anxious relatives had been gathering, with rumours flying about a crash or hijacking, and a two-hour overdue aeroplane is officially classified as “distressed”. KAL reacted in exactly the way the Japanese at Narita should have had and did not; in four minutes it had already declared 007 missing, and no less than the company’s vice president was on the way to the airport to speak to the relatives. And then something even stranger, on this day of strangeness, happened.

Section 2. What America Knew.

At 0100, six and a half hours after the shootdown, the South Korean Foreign Ministry made a remarkable declaration that 007 had been forced down by Soviet fighters and had landed on Sakhalin, and that all passengers were safe. Where it got this piece of news from is unknown, but was certainly not the Soviets; the Japanese Embassy in Moscow contacted the Soviet Foreign Ministry, which denied that the plane was on Sakhalin. Nor could it have been the Japanese, who were clearly aware, from the radar on Wakkanai, that the plane had crashed. Also it wasn’t the South Korean military, whose surveillance capabilities at the time were primitive. There is therefore just one possible remaining source, and this, as the *New York Times* later confirmed from South Korean officials, was the CIA. So did the South Korean Foreign Ministry, which on 8th September said that it had got the information from the “intelligence service of a friendly government”. The only two governments at the time which were “friendly” to the vile dictatorship in Seoul were Japan and the US...and the Japanese vehemently denied that it was them.

Why would the CIA make such an absurd claim, which was to prolong the agony of the passengers’ relatives by giving them false hope? Obviously, it could not be unaware that the plane had gone down. The US surveillance aircraft, ships and ground station – as well as a reconnaissance satellite overhead – had all been watching this spot of the earth. Johnson lists the US intelligence assets covering Sakhalin at this time:

1.On Shemya Island, the US had Cobra Dane, a phased array missile tracking radar with a range of 200 “miles”, and Cobra Talon, which, Johnson says, “would have been able to follow 007 almost throughout the whole flight and certainly at the time of the shoot down.”

2.Then, on the ship USS *Observation Island*, operating in the North Pacific, there was Cobra Judy – and as many as *eight separate* US electronic listening posts whose names Johnson lists and which all focussed on Sakhalin and Kamchatka.

3.The RC 135 which 007 had passed, and which would most certainly have been monitoring the Boeing; it was part of routine procedure to monitor it and if necessary warn it that it was off course. Such a warning had been delivered even as long ago as 1968 to a *civilian* DC8 (with much, much more primitive navigational equipment than 007) flying US troops to Vietnam and which had gone astray over the Kurils. Wakkanai at once had radioed the DC8 directly while Shemya had radioed Anchorage; though the plane was intercepted by a PVO MiG 17 and forced to land, the fact was that warnings had gone out. It is ridiculous to imagine that what the Americans and Japanese could do in 1968, they could not, with their far superior abilities, do in 1983.

Apart from these three, there were numerous others, some of which we'll be discussing in due course.

Also, the RC 135s flying reconnaissance over the area had not only gigantic electronic arrays, with radar, electronic surveillance equipment and jammers, but their crews included interpreters providing real-time translation from Russian to English. This translation was not even a new thing, or restricted to Russian-to-English; in the Mediterranean a couple of years earlier, an RC 135 on a surveillance mission intruding into Libyan airspace had been able to fly to safety when the Arabic translators aboard had overheard ground controllers directing fighter pilots to take off.

There's a rather ridiculous account of the shootdown – *Ambush over Moneron*[13] – which is filled with laughable inaccuracies, including claims that there were four Su 15s and that the Boeing had "unknowingly managed to evade the latest and most capable Soviet MiG fighters"; these would be the obsolescent MiG 23s over Kamchatka. But even this account, which relentlessly pushes the line that 007 was innocently lost, says –

"At 6:15 a.m. Osipovich received orders to close with the intruder and identify it. But before he could do so, he was ordered by Tretyak to "Kill the intruder." Horrified crewmen aboard the American RC-135, who had been monitoring the Soviet activities, heard this order repeated no less than five times."

Since the shootdown happened, as General Takeda of the Japanese Air Self Defence Force said, at 325 am local time, how the account manages to push the shootdown almost three hours into the future is for the reader to surmise. But the point remains that the RC 135 was not only aware of the shootdown, it was perfectly well able to listen in on ground communications to the fighters, not just fighters to the ground.

“Nothing flies,” a US Air Force officer from the Pentagon said to the *Omaha News Herald*, “from, over or near Sakhalin that we don’t monitor...surveillance routinely includes the eavesdropping...on Soviet military radar transmissions, both ground to air and air to air conversations...they listen to everything...24 hours a day, every day.”

Later on, the US would claim that they were not able to listen in on the ground controllers’ part of the conversation, because they were only listening from ground electronics posts below the curve of the horizon. On 5th September Reagan himself said so. That this was a lie was evident, since Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Masaharu Gotoda announced on Japanese TV on the next day, 6th September that the Japanese themselves – whose surveillance capabilities were substantially weaker than the Americans – had the recording of the ground controllers’ directions, but would not release them (Takahashi has him declaring this on the 1st itself). On this day, too, the *New York Times* – which apparently at that time was not the pathetic purveyor of White House propaganda it is now – reported that a senior administration official had confirmed not only the existence of the recordings but that they proved 007 had been ordered to be shot down from the ground.

The next day, under considerable media questioning, Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman at the time, admitted the existence of some of the tapes...but said they were “unintelligible”. A few hours later Speakes reversed himself and declared that the US didn’t have the recordings at all. However, by this time just about everyone in the media knew that the recordings existed, and in the United Nations, on 8th September, the USSR accused Japan – since Gotoda had formally acknowledged the existence of the recordings – of being in a position to warn 007 and not doing so. Faced with this eminently reasonable charge, the Japanese government at once reversed course and declared that it did not have the recordings at all.

Do you see now why I characterised the Japanese and South Korean regimes as little more than US colonies earlier in this article?

Not only would the US’ listening outposts have known of the shootdown, they would have been able to transmit it to the top levels of the US government almost in real time. US spokespersons later attempted to dissimulate the abilities of the RC 135; rather ironically for a militaristic, aggressive imperialist empire which routinely claims its weapons are the best in the known universe, the US in this instance tried to pass off the RC as virtually deaf and blind, able only to do limited intelligence gathering. As we have already seen, this was a total lie in itself. Besides, it had the communication ability to “get any message into the President’s hands from anywhere in the world within ten minutes”. Two former RC 135 pilots, in fact, came forward to state the plane’s actual, formidable capabilities. They were quickly shut up by government threats of legal action for giving away “sensitive information”, as they themselves admitted.

With all this capability, Johnson says, there are only three explanations for the US’ failure to warn 007:

1.Either there was a series of simultaneous major failures of the entire US surveillance system in the North Pacific, all of which would have had to fail in the same way, *or*

2.007 was on a known surveillance mission, *or*

3.007 was actually accidentally off course, but the US, though aware of it, let the plane stay on its wrong course so as to attempt to gather the intelligence windfall this would bring.

Therefore, on 1st September, when the CIA told the South Korean Foreign Ministry that 007 had landed on Sakhalin, it perfectly well knew the plane was gone, and the "explosive decompression" message sent by 007 to Narita *confirmed* that it could not have put down unscathed on Sakhalin. Therefore the only remaining answer is that it was a quite deliberate decision, and the only way this decision makes sense is to buy time.

Why would the CIA want to buy time? To answer that question we'd have to refer back to the shooting down of Francis Gary Powers' U2, which was also a CIA operation, in 1960. The US, when Powers went missing, assumed that he'd been killed either in the shooting down itself *or* by the bomb on his plane, *or* by the rigged ejection seat, *or* by the poisoned suicide coin he'd been given. So it put out a cover story that a civilian NASA weather plane had gone missing over Turkey after the pilot had reported oxygen difficulties and had – owing to an autopilot error – probably accidentally flown into Soviet territory. (Does anyone notice the 'blame the autopilot' theme here?) The Soviets waited until the US had made this statement, and then revealed that they not only had the plane, with its intact cameras and other spy equipment...but also the pilot, who, in Khrushchev's words, was "alive and kicking." It was a gigantic blow to then president Eisenhower's personal prestige – Eisenhower had personally approved the U2 spy flight and then lied about it – as well to his government's.

It seems fairly obvious, then, that this attempt to buy time was to ensure that the Soviets hadn't got hold of any incriminating evidence from 007...such as, perhaps, a live crew member who was in the know about what had actually happened. Only when it was fairly well established that the USSR was in the dark about 007's identity and crash location was the go-ahead given to give out the news that it had crashed.

Given American real-time abilities, the latest the top level of the US government – Reagan was vacationing at his ranch in California, but his coterie of cronies were camped nearby to be at hand at all times – would have been informed of the crash at most twenty minutes after it occurred. Yet it was eight whole hours after the shooting down that CIA chief Clark phoned Reagan to inform him that 007 was "missing". And it was eleven hours after the shooting down that Clark, who ought to have already been aware for at least ten and a half hours that 007 had been destroyed, phoned Reagan again to tell him that the situation was "still unclear." And it wasn't until four and a half hours after *that* that the White House staff was informed that 007 had been shot down.

So ridiculous was this time lag that not even the American media could swallow it, though, in the next days as the Reagan administration frothed over at the mouth with carefully simulated outrage, they merrily forgot it. But the fact remains that not only did the American government know when it happened, they hid that knowledge. Why?

One of the possibilities is that, even before the fake news was given to the relatives at Gimpo, an American search operation to recover the wreckage was already under way.

Section 3: The Search Operation and the Black Boxes.

As we've already described, Narita only issued an alert an hour after 007 went missing. The Tokyo Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) was told at 1915 that 007 was missing, and then only "between 2100 and 2300" – as Johnson says, this is a remarkably imprecise time – that it decided to mount a search and rescue operation. And when it did, its planes and rescue ships were sent not to where 007 had actually gone down, but where 007 would have been if it had been on its correct course...that is, 587 kilometres from its actual crash site.

It was even later than this, at 2330, that the Japanese Maritime Safety Agency (MSA) was informed by Wakkanai that it had seen a plane go down on radar some five hours before. The MSA moved a couple of ships and planes to the general area west of Sakhalin, but made no effort to redirect the RCC search effort, which continued in the wrong place. These MSA ships finally arrived in the actual crash site eight and a half hours after the shootdown...by which time any survivors would be almost certainly dead anyway.

You'll note that this means that the search operations were under way even before the relatives of the passengers were told that the plane was safe on Sakhalin.

When the MSA ships reached the (actual) crash site, just outside Soviet territorial waters, they found two Russian ships and five planes already searching – which shows that the USSR wasn't slow off the bat in this. Soon a growing flotilla of fishing boats from Wakkanai and other ships joined the search. What was extremely remarkable was that at this stage, as far as the Western official line went, *American ships were not involved in this operation at all*. Initial reports said US search and rescue ships and planes were taking part in the search effort but when media people tried to confirm this they came up against a wall of silence. And the initial reports of US involvement suddenly disappeared from the media. Given that, as we'll see, the US was at that very moment preparing a propaganda blitz against the USSR, this non involvement is inexplicable.

It was only on 10th September that the *New York Times* said US ships and planes – including P3C surveillance planes – were involved in the search. Three days after that, the Pentagon's spokesman admitted that the US actually had the first ships of all on the crash scene, proving, of course, that the US had known exactly where it had occurred, even before using the CIA to give the relatives the fake report. One of these ships that he named was an electronic surveillance frigate, the USS *Badger*, which the Soviets, as will be seen, had already accused of being on a spying mission just offshore. If all this was supposed to be a humanitarian effort, why keep it secret for two weeks?

There is nothing too mysterious about the US knowing where the plane had gone down. At that time, the US had seeded the sea around Soviet submarine and other naval bases with a system of extremely powerful microphones, which were monitored by shore and ship stations round the clock, and whose function was to track all Russian naval activity. These microphones were so powerful that they could easily pick up engine noises from many kilometres away. The splash of the plane hitting the water would register on them at once and make it very easy to know the exact spot of the crash.

Meanwhile, the US was busy securing, as even Wikipedia admits, from the South Korean (dictatorship) government, a document designating the US and Japan as search and salvage agents; this made it illegal for the USSR to salvage any wreckage from outside its own territorial waters, even if it found it. The USSR reacted by physically blocking US ships from accessing Soviet territorial waters, while it searched inside them at its boundaries. According to Johnson, the US' salvage operations were so much in advance of the Soviet capabilities that the latter were virtually "Stone Age", using fishing nets to trawl for wreckage. Whether this was actually so, we shall see.

By now, the main purpose of the operations, of course, was the search for the two black boxes – the Flight Data Recorder and the Cockpit Voice Recorder. According to Johnson, the US had the best underwater salvage equipment in the world – so good that it had even successfully stolen parts from sunken Soviet subs from the depths of the Atlantic and Pacific, in violation of international law, for analysis. In this relatively shallow water, where the wreckage could only be in a confined area, the black boxes should therefore have been extremely easy to find, especially since they had a beacon that gave out a constant signal for thirty days. The Pentagon spokesman, in fact, was highly optimistic about picking up the black box very shortly.

Strange it was, therefore, that the US allegedly did *not* find the black boxes at all. For day after day, these ships – allegedly – continued to search, and yet turned up nothing. Meanwhile the *New York Times* had already begun telling the American people (on 8th September) that the Soviets would fake a black box "proving" 007 had been on an espionage mission, and "find" it. Caspar Weinberger, the Defense (sic) Secretary, repeated the same thing the next day, as did Reagan's California crony the ex-judge Clark on 14th September. The State Department then drove the same message home on 16th September: 007 was not, could not have been, on a surveillance mission, and any evidence the Russians might use, at any time, to prove that it had been, no matter how solid it seemed, had to be a Soviet fake.

As time went on and the black boxes were – allegedly – not found, the tale began shifting. Suddenly, the water became deeper than it had formerly been, from “a few hundred feet” to “600-900 feet” (Japanese account) and “900-1200 feet” (US account). As always, the two “allies” could not even get their stories to agree, and as always the Japanese then changed their tale to coincide with the US one. Later, the depth mysteriously increased even further, to 2500 feet, and, later still, to 5000 feet. Not that this depth would have provided any challenge to the American salvage ships, which had salvaged the sunken submarines from over three times that depth, and even that under conditions of secrecy; while there were, or should be, no requirement for secrecy now.

Apart from the mysteriously deepening ocean, the Americans, Johnson says, apparently couldn’t find the wreckage. This, too, was incredible. Even the Russians with their fishing nets accumulated enough shattered metal, personal effects and mangled corpses to return to Japan, but the US – with all its abilities – couldn’t find substantial parts of the wreckage. Keep this in mind for later.

The black box beacons (‘pingers’) also began playing hide and seek with the searchers. The Pentagon finally, after all these days of searching, said that it had, on 17th to 18th September, located the pinger (unclear one or both; each black box, of course, would have one) in international waters. Since the pingers had a range of only 2000 to 4000 metres, it meant that the ships which found them had to be at most four kilometres from them. On 19th September the ships allegedly got a strong fix on it for an hour and then lost it again. How, if they’d got a fix on it, they couldn’t find it is something I couldn’t tell you. Even if they lost the signal, they could have dropped buoys to mark the location and searched everywhere within a radius of four kilometres? There were by this time as many as seven separate US Navy ships allegedly searching for the black box...and yet with all their electronic marvels, they couldn’t find it. Were the black boxes crawling around on the ocean floor? Did they have legs?

In comparison, the black boxes of the Air India plane I mentioned earlier were located easily within three days at a much greater depth on the sea bed of the Atlantic, never lost again, and then raised – along with much of the wreckage and 131 of the bodies – with little trouble.

For a week more, nothing happened, though then the aforementioned Japanese Cabinet Secretary Gotoda made a slip when he said that *Japan didn’t know whether the US had already found the black box(es)*. The US then hurriedly announced that it had *not* found the boxes. Time was running out for the pingers, too, which had battery power for thirty days, but that meant nothing if the location was known. By 30th September the Japanese gave up in disgust and withdrew from the search, by which time, Johnson says, it was common knowledge in Japan that the Americans had already found the boxes and were keeping them to themselves, while making a pretence of looking for them. In fact, if the US Navy were on the spot first, as the Pentagon itself claimed, and if their salvage abilities were even half as good as they had already proved to be, it’s very, very hard to see how this could not be so. On 6th November, citing bad weather, the US Navy called off the search, and for some mysterious reason never resumed it again.

Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the 'pinger' signal the US ships had repeatedly found and lost were not from the black boxes themselves but something else that, somehow, by some incredible coincidence, exactly mimicked the black box pinger frequency. Then shouldn't the US navy ships have found this...fake pinger...at least?

Johnson's discussion of the black boxes ends at this point, with the search being called off, and the near certainty that the boxes had been found right away by the Americans, hidden by them because they contained incriminating evidence, with the rest of the search being a bad drama. But he was writing in 1986, and the story of the black boxes didn't end there.

In 1993, the Russian president, Boris Yeltsin – a drunken and incompetent sot who in that same year was to order the shelling of his own parliament when it defied his decrees, and in appreciation be considered a great democrat by his American masters – returned the "black boxes" to South Korea. He claimed that the USSR had found them in 1983, and kept them hidden because they couldn't prove the Soviet version which said that 007 was on an espionage mission; and that the rest of the Soviet search effort was a charade like the US one was as per Johnson, and provided some alleged "top secret memoranda" said to prove this. In fact, when the International Civil Aviation Organisation checked the data on the black boxes, the flight data recorder somehow or other exactly matched the American account of the crash – down to the five minutes of level flight at 16000 feet, and the spiralling descent over Moneron. It even managed to find the exact amount of damage that somehow or other must have happened to precisely and exactly imitate the American version of 007's last moments; no changes at all.

And the cockpit voice recorder, of course, showed the crew talking calmly to each other before the missile strike, about inconsequential things, with no idea that they were either astray or that the Soviets were stalking them at all. Also, as I said earlier, after the missile strike, too, they, somehow or other, kept talking rationally, without making any attempt to make a distress call. Remember that the flight data recorder *also* had said the cabin had become depressurised, so the cockpit voice recorder and the FDR are actually *contradicting each other*...not to speak of the CVR contradicting the Narita account of the last transmission from 007.

Somehow or other, we are expected to swallow the contradictions between the CVR and FDR on the one hand *as well as* the CVR and the Narita radio report*, and* the FDR and the Wakkanai radar report on the other. And we are to somehow swallow the idea that all these *exactly* matched the account of the US, which, as we have seen and will see, kept shifting and changing *as well*.

As lawyers say, if you hear two witnesses agreeing in court about every single detail of a particular episode, you are listening to a prearranged lie.

Could the Soviets have recovered the black boxes? It is possible, of course. Russian submersibles today, as nobody now denies, are among the very best in the world, if not *the* best, and are routinely used to

explore and salvage wrecks like the *Titanic* and *Bismarck*. Johnson's contemptuous description of their salvage efforts as "Stone Age" is ludicrous. But there's no particular reason why the USSR should have salvage systems ready for instant deployment in the Sea of Okhotsk, and surely, if they'd found the black boxes, the massive US presence on the scene, which was there before the USSR itself, would have found some indication of it, overheard messages and so on? And if the Soviets had found the boxes, couldn't they have done what they were being accused of doing anyway, doctored the box recordings to prove their own version of the story?

In fact, is there any logical reason for saying they *wouldn't* have done precisely that, to turn the tide in a media war they were massively losing?

Let me, therefore, present an alternate scenario. The US ships on the spot, arriving almost immediately after the crash, as even the Pentagon admitted, find the black boxes. They contain sensitive information, which prove the US version is a lie and that 007 was on a surveillance mission. The US therefore hides away the boxes. Years later, when the USSR is gone and the pliant, totally subservient puppet Boris Yeltsin is in charge in Russia, they pass off the boxes – now filled with faked data – to him and have him release them to South Korea.

Would Yeltsin have done it? Totally. He was so completely under the American thumb that the US in the 90s virtually ruled Russia by proxy. And one of his constant efforts was to denigrate the USSR in every way possible; he was the main engine behind its destruction, after all. Something that "proved" more evildoing by the Soviets was something he'd love.

Would the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), which analysed the black box data, not be suspicious? The ICAO, as I'll discuss a bit further on, is hardly a disinterested authority; by 1984, it had already predecided that its investigation would only concern looking into how 007 "lost its way". It would hardly admit ten years later that it had then been chasing the wrong hare. By then, in its records, the "off course by accident" hypothesis was written in stone.

Those who argue that the black boxes are genuine, and that 007 was actually off course by accident, will have to somehow fit in all the discrepancies I've repeatedly mentioned in 007's flight – the failure to check instruments, the failure to check radar, the changing velocities, the lying to Narita about the change of altitude – and then describe how it is possible. Johnson, towards the close of the book, made an attempt to calculate the odds against all these various things happening on the same night to provide an explanation for 007's flight that did *not* involve espionage, and gave up when the odds reached "billions or trillions to one."[14]

Let *me*, then, in Johnson's style, provide a list of explanations for the black boxes released by Yeltsin in 1993, quite apart from the odds Johnson attempted to calculate.

1.*Either* the Americans found the black boxes, and kept them secret for ten years, before handing them unchanged to Yeltsin. In which case, there is a need to explain why the data wasn't released right away by the US since it so very, very exactly agreed with and proved everything they said.

Or,

2. The Soviets found the boxes, and for some reason managed to do this secretly right under the gaze of massive American surveillance. They then not only kept them hidden but did *not* change the data to reflect their own version of events. In which case one has to *also* explain why the US couldn't find them, and what those pingers were that they located but couldn't retrieve.

Or,

3.The Americans found the black boxes, kept them secret for ten years, and handed Yeltsin a faked version to pass off as the genuine item.

There is no fourth explanation.

Section 4: The American surveillance.

One of the major problems with writing an account of this sort is that so many things occurred simultaneously that it's impossible to describe them all at once; one has to take them part by part. Let's step back a moment, then, to look back at the US surveillance operation on the night of the shootdown. What were all those American planes and ships doing there?

Once the US had stopped pretending that it was not conducting exceptionally rigorous surveillance of Eastern Siberia on the night in question, even more rigorous than its usual efforts, it attempted the explanation – which, of course, Wikipedia repeats uncritically – that the RC 135 007 encountered was there to monitor a Soviet PL 5 missile test on that night. However, somehow or other, the USSR never actually conducted any such test that night; when challenged on this point the US shifted the story to say the test had been cancelled at the last moment, too late to recall the RC 135. Besides, the RC 135 was not well equipped to monitor missile tests, especially since it wasn't known at what precise moment that missile would be tested. For that you'd need a slower plane that could loiter for long periods outside the territorial waters...such as a P 3C, which the US had readily available at Shemya, and which as we've

seen was used in the so-called search operations. The RC, though, was in a much better position to match velocities with 007 and mask its identity by flying close to it.

Then there were the ships – including the *Badger* I mentioned and two other platforms, high above. One, believe it or not, was the space shuttle *Challenger*. This had taken off with an Indian INSAT series satellite, and a so-called "dummy" satellite in place of one that was not ready at the last minute. Why *Challenger* couldn't wait for it to be ready for a day or to more is a question nobody asked, but the shuttle was certainly over Kamchatka on that evening, and the crew allowed themselves to be used as part of the propaganda media offensive against the USSR in the next few days.

The other platform, even if we ignore the shuttle, was a surveillance satellite, known to the Soviets as a Ferret D. This made *three separate orbits* over the Kamchatka-Eastern Siberia region during the hours of 007's intrusion into Soviet airspace. The Ferret D in question (No 1981-42C) was perfectly placed to monitor Soviet radar signatures if the radars of eastern Siberia had all been turned on...and, as we've already seen, they were. American spokesmen, when challenged about this, mocked the Soviet assertions, and (correctly) said that not even the orbits described were accurate. As Johnson points out, though, the correct orbits actually made the Soviet accusations even *more* credible, not less.

All in all, the chances that these platforms were all over Siberia to monitor a missile test which never took place are very, *very* remote. That they were there because they expected something else to happen, such as radars being turned on, are so much more likely that it requires some suspension of disbelief to imagine otherwise.

Section 5: The propaganda war.

At the end of Section 2 of this part – titled *What America Knew* – I mentioned that one possible reason the CIA passed the false "safe on Sakhalin" story was to allow the retrieval of the black boxes and wreckage. There was another reason, which was to buy time to prepare the official line – the propaganda campaign that was being readied.

In this propaganda war, the Soviets didn't have a chance. The Americans had been hardened professionals in this game since at least the Spanish-American War; by 1983, "manufacturing opinion" had become a Hollywood-style marketing exercise. It had not yet reached the level of the Bushist brainwashing campaign in the run up to the Iraq invasion, but still totally outclassed any campaign before. Reagan himself fired the first shots in it on 5th September, when, in a televised address to the nation he declared[15]

'...the Soviet action "monstrous," "murderous," and "born of a society which wantonly disregards individual rights and the value of human life." '

The primary thrust of American propaganda was directed at two points – one, a "heaven-sent" opportunity to "isolate" the USSR, and the other, to squeeze through Reagan's MX and Pershing missile programmes. As we'll mention towards the end of this article, nothing has changed in those two things; today, American propaganda is still fully geared towards trying to "isolate" Russia and push through its own military spending programmes; that the man in charge, the blood soaked war criminal Barack Hussein Obama, is a Democrat and not a Republican like Reagan makes no difference at all.

The American propaganda barrage was on two different fronts – one in the media, for domestic consumption, and one in the UN and other international fora. While George Shultz and Reagan himself foamed at the mouth for the TV cameras at home, the war in the United Nations was left to the US ambassador to the UN, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and her assistants. There seems to be some kind of law that any US ambassador to the UN, to this day, has to be rabidly anti-Russian, and Kirkpatrick was certainly right from that mould. Even while the US was still to admit that 007 had even encountered the RC 135, Kirkpatrick's deputy at the UN was calling the shooting down "wanton, calculated, deliberate murder".

Typical of that was the American propaganda mouthpiece, *Time*.

It was only on 4th September that the US, in the form of Reagan himself, finally admitted that an RC 135 had "briefly crossed" 007's path at some point in its flight. The idea was that this, coming from Reagan himself, would put an end to any speculation that it wasn't an accidental meeting. By then, the US public had already been largely conditioned into an anti-Russian frenzy, so the dribs and drabs in which the Reagan administration gave out the truth, as it was forced to do so, was hardly remarked in the media. For example, let's go over a few of them again:

1.The first tale was that the Soviets wantonly shot down an airliner which was in international airspace until south of Kamchatka and then accidentally veered over Sakhalin.

2.OK, they admitted, all right, the plane was off course right from the beginning, but it was totally innocent, and the Soviets could not have failed to know it was a passenger plane.

3.OK, the Soviet pilot might have had doubts about the plane's identity, but made no attempt to contact the plane because Soviet planes did not carry radios set to that frequency.

4.OK, the Soviets did carry radios set to that frequency, but couldn't have fired cannon bursts as warning because the fighter in question had no cannon.

5.OK, the plane *did* have cannon, but must have fired only non-tracer rounds, because we say so. In any case it was a totally wanton shooting down and it had absolutely nothing to do with any spy mission.

6.OK, so it *had* met an RC 135, but that was totally an accidental meeting and had nothing to do with a spy mission, the RC being on a routine patrol.

7.OK, so the RC was *not* on a routine patrol, but all the surveillance activity was because of a Soviet missile test.

8.OK, so the missile test did not happen, but that was only because of a last-minute cancellation.

9.In any case, the plane was off course by accident, the Russians are evil, and you must trust us on this.

This farrago of lies, innuendo and outright misdirection was helped to a considerable extent by tremendously lethargic and incompetent Soviet media management. Even as Reagan at once and successfully used this to push through the MX, Pershing and even a nerve gas programme through his government, sidelining all the lobbies clamouring for peace and free trade, the Soviets initially denied having shot down the plane at all. Then they said, correctly, that they had mistaken it for an RC 135 and it was anyway on a spy mission, and since it was intruding in their airspace illegally it was totally within their rights to have shot it down. But by this time nobody in America was in a mood to listen at all.

Strangely enough, the attacks on Reagan came, not from his alleged opponents in the Democratic Party, but from his fellow Republicans, those even further to the right from him. They accused him of being “too soft” on the Russians, of not going far enough to confront them. In response Reagan threatened to throw the UN out of New York, something that would not have done the economy of that city a lot of good, but would have been definitely a good thing in that it would have rescued that body from American influence. The Soviet president, Andrei Gromyko, was also due to speak at the UN; totally illegally, the US denied his plane landing rights at the civilian airport.

But not even the massive propaganda barrage by the US government could keep the lid on the burgeoning list of contradictions and inconsistencies in the official story. The relatives of the 007 passengers, for one, were from the start convinced that the plane was on a spy mission and nobody was telling them the truth. As the murmurs grew, Reagan responded by accusing the Soviet airline, Aeroflot, of using its planes for surveillance purposes on “scores” of occasions. Asked to substantiate this accusation with actual figures, the US finally pointed out two instances when Aeroflot planes had overflown, once, a Trident submarine base and on another occasion a bomber airfield...but carefully omitted mentioning that the Soviet airline had asked for and obtained permission in advance for both those overflights. The lie machine was in full swing.

Reagan would have loved to ban Aeroflot from American airspace; it would have been a nice dramatic gesture for the cameras. But he couldn’t do that because he’d already banned Aeroflot in January 1982. So he had to content himself with trying to force a boycott of the Soviet Union on international airlines. This attempted boycott was a total failure, so much so that not even the US’ European vassals joined in it. Within two weeks it collapsed completely.

Meanwhile, the Soviets had finally got their act together and responded with a propaganda offensive of their own. On 9th September, they held a press conference in Moscow where Marshal of the Soviet Union Nikolai Ogarkov, the Chief of Staff of the Soviet Armed forces, met hundreds of Western journalists. Ogarkov, “confident, assured and unruffled”, laid out, with the help of maps, the Soviet case that 007 was on a surveillance mission. He was essentially handicapped by two things: first, the fact that the West, at whom the press conference was aimed, was inclined to disbelieve anything the USSR said on principle; and, secondly, the fact that he only had the truth on his side.

“What is left to us?” he wondered aloud afterwards. At that point, it was obvious that all he could manage was damage control. America had easily won the propaganda war.

But by now, the Reagan administration had come to the conclusion that it had hit the point of diminishing returns; unlike the blood soaked war criminal Barack Hussein Obama, Reagan or his advisors retained enough of a sense of reality to know at what point to quit. That things had gone too far was obvious when on 28th September when the very ill general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Yuri Andropov, rose from his sickbed to personally denounce Reagan’s warmongering. The Reaganites had already got as much as they could get out of the matter; little by little, they began to dial the tension back.

One full year after the incident, on the first anniversary of the shooting down, the US finally admitted that the Soviets had not known they were shooting down a passenger plane.

Section 6: At the ICAO.

One of the most interesting factors in the whole 007 affair was the resolute refusal of the US government, in violation of its own laws, to allow its civilian accident investigation bodies to enquire into the shooting down. The plane had been of US manufacture and had left an American airport; the law clearly was that investigating it was the duty of the requisite body, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). However, not only did the US government not permit this, it demanded that the NTSB hand over all the documents in its possession on the affair to the State Department.

The US then demanded an investigation by the ICAO, which was a non-political organisation which had never held any such thing before. And as its own representative, it sent the head of the FAA, a rabid Reaganite, to compel the ICAO to do things its way. The idea was to force through an official condemnation of the USSR, and at the ICAO, packed with American "allies", it should have been easy. The USSR was almost alone, with only Czechoslovakia on its side. But the condemnation did not happen – because of India. It was still the time when India had a government with some backbone, and it refused to allow this "condemnation". Finally, a watered down resolution, expressing "concern," was all that was passed, and even that didn't get anything like anonymous support.

The ICAO then put together its "investigation team". That it would produce a predetermined report was clear from the beginning. That the South Koreans said 007 was delayed at Anchorage because it didn't want to arrive at Seoul before 6am was taken as proof that it couldn't have been on a spy mission; no other evidence about this was even considered, or even the fact that KAL planes actually routinely landed before 6am. Therefore, from the start, it was going to be a report which would have to find some way to explain away all the inconsistencies and contradictions in the official narrative. Even then, ICAO's own report, Johnson shows, pretty clearly indicated that it could not explain 007's route as an accident. It considered six different explanations, rejected four as being totally impossible, and then declared that one or the other of the remaining two – an INS programming error or a magnetic compass heading error – had to be responsible, even though neither of these could explain the track 007 actually followed either; a track, including the turn over Sakhalin, the ICAO actually *accepted* happened. Not even the International Federation of Air Lines Pilots' Associations accepted this report, let alone the USSR. Nor, since it also said that the pilots were guilty of remarkable inattention to their cockpit instrumentation, did it please either the South Koreans or their American overlords.

In fact, even the ICAO compromise report had been far from unanimous. Its Air Navigation Commission issued a separate report which pointed out many of the holes in the official US version, including the claim that Osipovich had told his controllers the "strobe light is flashing". As I said earlier in this article, he had merely said "it is flashing." Even more, the ANC report said, 007 had *not been equipped with white strobe lights at all*. And it stated clearly that the extent of 007's deviation could not be explained. Obviously, some people in the ICAO knew the truth, but were constrained from pointing it out by their terms of reference.

But the official conclusion by the ICAO had been reached: 007 was off course by accident, and had been shot down as the result of an error. And once that conclusion had been reached, of course, the ICAO could never say otherwise.

However, even supposing 007 *had* been identified as a civilian airliner by the Soviets, would it have made a difference? And would the shooting down have been illegal at all?

In the next part of this article, we'll take a look at that question.

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Part 5: Civilian Planes, Espionage, and Security.

"No matter whether the surveillance theory is true or not," Johnson avers, "this does not exculpate the Russians. They should not have shot down an airliner whatever it was doing, and they should not have shot down a plane that they could not identify...no excuse is good enough."

Even seen from the perspective of the time in which Johnson was writing, 1986, this logic seems a trifle faulty. Surely, he does not mean that if the USSR, for example, had had a spy plane overfly its territory at an altitude at which it could not be seen, and under circumstances in which it could not be identified, that they should not have tried to shoot it down? One is reminded of the Powers incident once again; Powers was flying at *twice* the altitude of 007, and even that wasn't the maximum altitude his U2 was capable of. By 1983, SR 71 Blackbird spy planes were overflying the USSR at altitudes and speeds that left the U2 in the dust. And yet, if one follows Johnson's logic to its conclusion, the USSR could not rule out the possibility that those spy planes might be high flying civilian planes and would have to come close enough for visual confirmation of their identity before even considering the possibility that they could be shot down.

Years later, of course, after the attacks of 11/9, that sounds even more hollow. Today, a plane that is hijacked – or *suspected* to be hijacked – and even potentially might be used as a weapon would be shot down, passengers and all, with not a moment's hesitation whatsoever, by the very same so-called democracies which condemned the USSR.

I am, of course, talking about deliberate shooting down of *aircraft which are flying where they have no business to be flying*. I am *not* referring to incidents like the destruction of Iran Air Flight 655 by the American frigate USS *Vincennes* in 1988[16]; the plane was flying in Iranian airspace, and it was the frigate which was intruding. Two years after the incident, the US government even gave the captain of the frigate

a medal; it is not hard to imagine the outraged howls that would have arisen if the Soviet government had likewise decorated Osipovich. The almost genetic hypocrisy that is so characteristic of virtually all American discourse, while condemning the USSR, got behind George HW Bush's comment on that occasion: "I will never apologise for the United States; *I don't care what the facts are*."

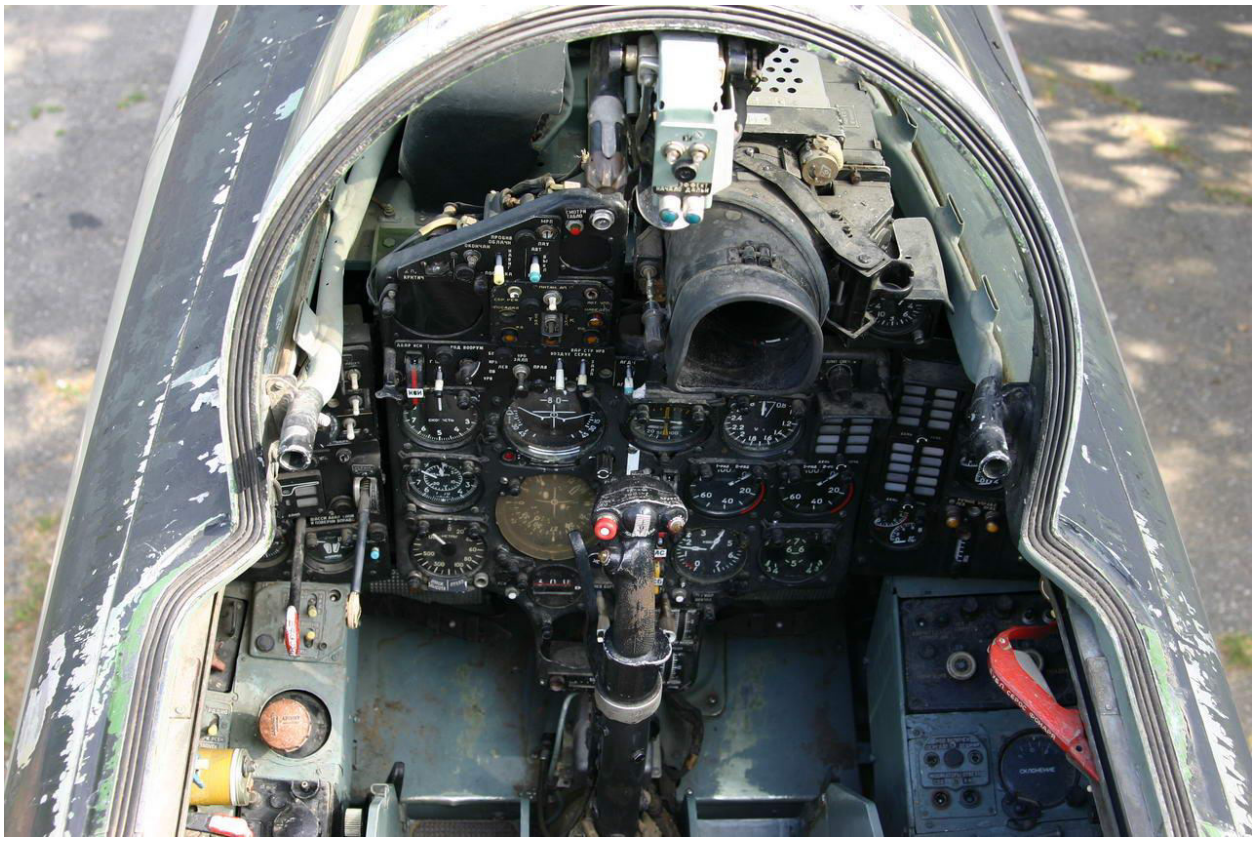
But I'm not an American, and I do, obviously, care about the facts. So let's for the moment ignore Johnson's opinions and look at the facts.

Section 1: What did Osipovich see?

Earlier on I referred to the Japanese Air Self Defence Force general and Chairman of the Japanese Joint Chiefs of Staff, Goro Takeda. "The Soviet pilot," he said, "could tell it was a large aircraft and may have seen its four engines. But in the darkness he could not have discerned the craft's silhouette, much less its insignia...the only sure method of identification is to get within 100 feet (that is, about 33 metres) of a suspect craft and note the number of windows."

Also, Takeda said, even assuming 007 was showing all its lights – and, as we have seen, the ICAO additional report said that 007 was *not* equipped with a flashing white strobe – the Soviet pilot would have had to be within 1000 feet, that is, 330 metres – of the aircraft, and would have had to be ahead or above it, to have seen the Boeing 747's allegedly unique dorsal hump. *According to the transcripts* that the Americans themselves released of Osipovich's conversation with the ground controllers, at no point was the major nearer than 2000 metres to the airliner, and given the Taifun M's radar limitations and the standard technique of interception of a large target, he would have been behind and below.

Let's take a moment to remind the reader that in any case Osipovich was flying an aircraft that was from an era before today's head-up displays, glass cockpits, image intensifiers and other high tech equipment. In fact, even for the time, his plane was aging and close to being totally obsolete. A look at the cluttered cockpit of the SU 15 will indicate that pilot view was not of the best. Note, incidentally, the radar screen, which is "head down" – the pilot, when looking at it, could not simultaneously see out through the canopy.



It can therefore be safely concluded that Osipovich could not have seen much, even had he been trying to.

But what if Osipovich *had* seen the hump? It would have meant precisely nothing...*because some models of the RC 135 had a hump as well*.

It is true that the Boeing 747 is about 30% larger than an RC 135, but scale only has a meaning when there is something to compare it to. In darkness, at a distance, there was no way Osipovich could measure dimensions. Therefore – going by the facts of the time – there seems to be no doubt that Osipovich could not have seen his target clearly enough to make an identification that it was a passenger plane. Takahashi says that

“From a distance of two kilometres the Boeing 747 with its 70 metre fuselage looks like a two-centimetre long object held in the palm of an outstretched hand...in total darkness and with overcast skies, it was impossible to visually identify the type of plane.”

But now we come to two interviews that Osipovich allegedly gave, one to *Izvestia* in 1991, to which I have already referred, and one to the *New York Times* in 1996[17].

I've already quoted from the *Izvestia* interview, and noted that Wikipedia cites it, not directly, but as reported in a book by an American author who cites it. Therefore, at best, it counts as hearsay evidence, and is less than fully dependable. But let's look at the *NYT* interview, which was allegedly made to an (unidentified) American journalist.

At once, we come up against some major contradictions. For instance, let's look at the ammunition.

At the time of the shooting, Osipovich said he'd fired four shells, each with 30 tracer rounds, making a total of 120 tracer rounds. To *Izvestia* he, allegedly, stated that he had fired 243 rounds, and that they were "armour piercing", not "incendiary", that is, tracers. Now, to the *New York Times*, he said

"To try to force the plane down he fired his cannon three times, shooting off a total of 520 rounds. But the shells did not contain tracers and were not visible at night. He said the Korean pilots still should have seen the flashes from his gun and also noticed when the SU-15 flashed his lights. That, he said, was a signal to follow the Soviet interceptor to his base or risk destruction."

Somehow, the number of shells fired has jumped from 120 to 243 to 520. This is obviously not a minor change.

This is what the *New York Times* has Osipovich say:

" "I was just next to him, on the same altitude, 150 meters to 200 meters (*sic*) away."…From the flashing lights and the configuration of the windows, he recognized the aircraft as a civilian type of plane, he said. "I saw two rows of windows and knew that this was a Boeing…I knew this was a civilian plane. But for me this meant nothing. It is easy to turn a civilian type of plane into one for military use." "

Of course, the RC 135 was *also* a Boeing product, something the article doesn't mention.

The same article has him “pulling his SU 15 alongside the lumbering 747 at an altitude of 34000 feet and seeing blinking lights on the top and bottom”. Now, if you’ve been paying attention to this account at all, you will know that 007 never climbed to that altitude, even though the pilot lied that he was doing so. You’ll also know that even the ICAO found that 007 *had* no flashing strobe lights. And, the distance that Osipovich says he was from the Boeing – 150 to 200 metres – is *five to six times* the distance (33 metres) General Takeda said he would have to be to have seen the windows at all. And if Osipovich said he flew 150 to 200 metres from the 747, and if we ignore Takeda and accept that he was close enough to see the double row of windows, obviously the crew of the plane should have seen *him* as well. At the very least they can’t have missed hearing his engine noise; remember that Johnson said other planes’ engines can be easily heard from inside a 747’s cockpit.

In fact, reading over the article, it seems to even contradict *itself*.

“His SU-15 fighter sent out electronic signals that would have brought a response from a Soviet plane identifying it as friendly. Western commercial airplanes are not equipped to respond to Soviet military signals, and no "friendly" response was received.”

Obviously, the whole idea of the IFF – it’s the IFF which is being talked about here – is to identify friend or foe. If you don’t get a friendly signal, why would you consider the other as anything but a foe? That is if the IFF was even turned on; as Clubb said, if 007 had been deliberately off course, it wouldn’t have been on anyway.

But there’s more. In this article, Osipovich says,

"I would have landed him on our airfield, and I wanted it very much," he said. "Do you think I wanted to kill him? I would rather have shared a bottle with him.'

But only a few paragraphs earlier:

“His first thought was that it was a Soviet transport plane being used to test the readiness of the air defense (*sic*) forces.”

But even though he thought it might be a Soviet plane on an exercise,

"…he was prepared to shoot the plane down as soon as it crossed the border and still regrets that he was not allowed to do so…"I asked the ground what to do," he said. "They got scared and told me to force him to land, and this was our big mistake." "

Reconcile these for me if you can. I dare you.

There are only two possible conclusions.

1.*Either* Osipovich was retroactively editing his memories, something which is far from unknown, and "remembering" things that never really happened (would, for example, his ground controllers have failed to note his coming that close to the target on their radar screens?) *or*

2.The *New York Times* article is a mix of cherry-picked quotes and fantasy.

But would the *New York Times* ever lie[18]? Surely not[19]!

Putting aside sarcasm, though, let's assume that the worst possible interpretation can be placed on Osipovich's actions. Let's assume that he not only knew he was following a passenger plane, he made no attempt to warn it and shot it down with malice aforethought. Does that let 007 off the hook? No, it does not.

Now let us see why.

Section 2: The Tale of KAL 902.

From what I've said so far, the reader might be forgiven for assuming that KAL 007's flight was the first time the USSR had faced an intrusion from a passenger plane under suspicious circumstances. Not only was it not the first, it wasn't even the first *from KAL itself*.

On 20th April 1978, five and a half years before the 007 incident, KAL 902, a Boeing 707, was flying from Paris to Seoul via – once again – Anchorage. Passing over the Arctic, about 500 kilometres from the North Pole, it somehow changed course "accidentally", did a hairpin turn, and flew back towards the south

east and the USSR. Takahashi gives an extremely detailed account of this incident, and says that three different Ferret D satellites (he provides even the serial numbers) were orbiting overhead during that time; a P 3C Orion was flying off the Soviet coast; and, sundry American listening posts in Norway were perpetually active.

Even the passengers aboard the plane saw the sun's position change, and realised the plane had changed course; but the crew did not seem to realise it. A Soviet PVO SU 15 then intercepted it and ordered it to land, but instead of obeying the plane flew over the giant Soviet naval base at Murmansk (recall that 007 passed over the giant Soviet naval base at Korsakov; KAL planes seemed to have a habit of accidentally overflying Soviet naval bases). The SU 15 then opened fire on the plane, killing two passengers. The plane then flew on, damaged, till it successfully force-landed on a frozen lake, 1000 kilometres inside the Soviet Union. The passengers and crew were later repatriated.

Although 902 was not equipped with an INS, even the passengers could see it was on the wrong course, and even they noticed the PVO fighter flying nearby, but somehow the crew, under Captain Kim Chang Kyi, didn't. One would have thought that Kim had shown such overwhelming incompetence at navigation and control that at the least he would be reprimanded and compelled to undergo retraining by KAL so that this kind of thing didn't happen again.

Well, guess what? He came home to a hero's welcome.

Wonders never cease, do they?

Section 3: CIA civilian flights.

Once upon a time, the largest airline in the world was Air America. It was also a wholly owned property of the CIA, which also owned three other airlines (Air Asia, Southern Air Transport and Intermountain Aviation). Johnson says there were at least twenty other airlines with CIA ties.

Even the CIA itself admitted using civilian planes overflying East Germany for espionage activities, and CIA civilian planes were highly active over Nicaragua at that very time in the 1980s, not only dropping arms and ammunition to Reagan's favourite right wing Contra death squads, but mining Nicaraguan harbours and rivers. Back in 1960, Francis Gary Powers' old U 2 had been a CIA operation, and Powers at the time had been a civilian CIA employee.

A Lufthansa pilot was quoted by Johnson as saying that

“Pilots (flying) international routes...often notice US military planes using civilian air routes and behaving like civilian planes...since 1947, thirty two times a civilian airplane (*sic*) has been shot down for the very same reason as the one over the Soviet Union: violation of foreign airspace.”

Actually, Johnson says, it was 33 times, not 32. And, obviously, for the West to pretend that the shooting down of KAL 007 was some kind of uniquely monstrous crime was scaling the heights of hypocrisy, to put it mildly.

It wasn’t just the Americans either; Johnson says in July 1985 a British air force Nimrod reconnaissance plane from No 42 squadron mimicked a civilian airliner, giving out a civilian transponder code and carrying on a dummy conversation with civilian air control, so as to overfly and photograph a Soviet naval exercise without being intercepted. This was, of course, met with glee by the British, but all it did was reinforce the point to the Soviets that just because a Western plane acted like a civilian aircraft, it was not necessarily so. At the very least this was a monumentally stupid action by the British, if not actively malevolent, and would endanger any civilian aircraft that even accidentally found its way into sensitive military space.

Incidentally, in the book by Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins, *O Jerusalem*[20], there is a description of a Zionistani air raid on Cairo airport during the so-called liberation war of the alleged state of Israel. The book, like all others by this duo, is mostly pulp fiction masquerading as history, so I can’t answer for the factuality of the episode. But they have their Zionistani protagonists flying at night towards Cairo airport in their bomber, pretending to be a civilian aeroplane, and securing permission to land on Runway Four. Instead of landing, of course, they fly low over the airfield, unloading their bombs. As they fly away, one of the Zionistanis radios the Cairo control tower. “Do you,” he chortles, “still want me to land on Runway Four?”

Section 4. International Law on Aerial Intrusions.

For a discussion on this, we have to go to Takahashi, who discusses the topic exhaustively. It isn’t possible to repeat everything he says, but here are the salient points:

The Convention of International Civil Aviation was established in Chicago in 1944. The significant parts of the Convention are as follows:

Article 1 says that “Every state has complete and exclusive sovereignty over the airspace above its territory.”

Article 4: “Civil aviation is prohibited for military purposes.”

Article 6: Since, as per Article 1, each state has sovereignty over its airspace, “a plane belonging to another country may enter it only upon that state’s consent given in advance. The country from which such consent is requested has the right to grant or deny it, and to attach special conditions restricting the flight. In addition, every country has the right to take all appropriate measures against an aircraft which violates its airspace, as called for by its laws.”

Article 9: “Every country has the inalienable right to mark off, proceeding from its military needs, zones banned for overflight.”

Article 12: “An aircraft which violates the airspace of another country must strictly comply with the air traffic regulations existing in that country.”

Therefore, KAL 007 was directly in violation of Articles 1, 6, 9 and 12, even if it was not a spy flight. And if it was a spy flight it violated Article 4 as well. And the US, in the shape of the CIA, had routinely violated Article 4.

Assuming that a plane has intruded into a nation’s airspace, what is the correct response? Takahashi, again, gives the Japanese Air Self-Defence Force’s standard procedure:

1.Establishing that a violation of the airspace has taken place.

2.Issuing warning signals to the intruding aircraft.

3.Forcing its landing, and if that fails

4.Employing weapons against it.

Takahashi then gives the almost identical Swedish regulations. Remember that as per the West Sweden and Japan are “enlightened democracies” – and their regulations, obviously, differed from the Soviet procedure employed against 007 and 902 earlier...not at all.

Takahashi also gives accounts of conversations he had with a Japanese and a French pilot who regularly flew routes over the USSR. As he said, neither of them had ever even seen a Soviet fighter stalk them...but they had stuck to the proper route. And both agreed that they couldn't understand how it could possibly have gone astray.

Ergo, Takahashi says, there is not the slightest doubt that in shooting down 007, the USSR was legally perfectly justified, and that it is not the defendant in this case. The burden of proof lies with the other side in this dispute.

But try telling that to anyone in the "free world" and see where that gets you.

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Part 6: Hersh.

I must make a confession at this point: I don't much care for Mr Seymour Hersh. I know of his reputation as an intrepid investigative journalist, but in recent years most of what I've read of his is regurgitation of what was already so well known as to be virtually undeniable[21], and he relies a lot on said reputation in order to reinforce his credibility. It does him no credit where it comes to his book on 007.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on this book, because it's basically an exercise in ignoring evidence, as even Johnson himself pointed out in a scathing review he wrote of it[22]. Not only is Hersh's writing poor, speculating on what the pilots were doing in the cockpit at any given moment, his theory, if one can call it that, depends on the Captain Chun staying out of the cockpit for five hours, while the plane went astray, and his two subordinates – very highly capable former military aircrew, let's remember – not daring to tell him something was wrong. It depends on totally ignoring the turn over Sakhalin, which was detected by no less than three separate Japanese radars at Wakkanai and certified as genuine by the ICAO; in fact, Hersh claims the turn never happened. It depends on Hersh ignoring all the inconsistencies over the fuel loads, the ignored waypoint reports, and all the other things I have talked about in the course of this article. And it depends on Hersh saying that he had not encountered anyone in the military who told him that 007 was on a spy mission.

Since someone as eminent as he had not been told that 007 was on a spying mission, it follows that 007 could not have been on a spying mission. Case closed!

Somehow, this seems less than persuasive to me.

Surprisingly, given all this, Hersh does not pin blame on the USSR, but directs it at the failure of the US to acknowledge that it had known from the start that the USSR had not known it was shooting down a civilian airliner. It dilutes the blame to such an extent that it's hardly surprising that American media jumped at it with a huge sigh of relief. They couldn't any longer pretend that there were not unmanageable inconsistencies in the official story; now they had an excuse to ignore the real inconsistencies and accept an explanation that seemed to address a few minor ones. Perfect!

This, actually, is a technique known as gatekeeper propaganda[23]. I wonder if Hersh knew he was doing it.

Whether he intended it or not, it turned out to be so.

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Part 7: Sequel.

The bizarre story of 007 wasn't over yet. In 1984, the relatives of the passengers were embroiled in a civil litigation, filed in the US, for damages against KAL. Obviously, KAL owed damages even if the official story were true; it was because of its crew's incredible negligence that the plane was off course so far. The relatives – as I said, they did not believe the official story, and presented some more evidence which we don't need to go into here – tried to involve the US government as a defendant. They also demanded the radar records of US military stations. However, something happened that was so inexplicable that even Wikipedia makes no attempt to explain it:

"It is customary for the Air Force to impound radar trackings involving possible litigation in cases of aviation accidents (but) the tapes from the Air Force radar installation at King Salmon, Alaska pertinent to KAL 007's flight in the Bethel area had been destroyed and could therefore not be supplied to the plaintiffs. At first Justice Department lawyer Jan Van Flatern stated that they were destroyed 15 days after the shootdown. Later, he said he had "misspoken" and changed the time of destruction to 30 hours after the event. A Pentagon spokesman concurred, saying that the tapes are re-cycled for reuse from 24–30 hours afterwards (but) the fate of KAL 007 was known inside this timeframe."

I do not believe any comments by me on this are necessary.

Then there was the curious affair of a very important potential witness. After the shooting down, South Korean media had interviewed several KAL pilots, among them Captain Kim of 902 (who presented a bizarre hypothesis that 007 had been hijacked) and Captain Choy Tak Yong, who had flown 007 from New York to Anchorage before handing over to Captain Chun. However, one pilot whom nobody seemed to be able to interview was Captain Park of KAL 015. Somehow, he seemed to have gone incommunicado.

Now, in 1984, the plaintiffs against KAL demanded that Captains Yong and Park appear as witnesses. Yong's testimony would be of limited value, but Park, of course, would be someone everyone would very much like to interrogate. There were so many questions to ask him: why had he taken off before time? Why had he flown so fast on the first leg of his flight? If Chun could talk to him on VHF, why didn't he wonder why 007 couldn't as easily contact Anchorage directly, seeing that they were allegedly flying though the same bit of sky? Why had he waited to be contacted by Anchorage before passing on messages from 007? If he was so close behind 007, why was his weather report so different from the other plane's, and since it was he who passed on both reports to Anchorage, why had he not remarked on the difference? Was he, as Takahashi charges, providing an "alibi" to 007? All these questions, and more, the lawyers would have wanted to ask him...and would have, if they could have got him to come.

But Captain Park did not come. Suddenly, he was no longer Captain Park, but *ex-Captain* Park, having abruptly resigned from his job. According to KAL, they had assigned him to a desk job, which he did not like, and so quit. Why KAL should have assigned a valuable and experienced pilot to flying a desk is a question I'll bet plenty of people would have wanted to ask as well...if only they could have. The significance, of course, is that the suit was against *KAL*, and if Park was now a private citizen, nobody could compel him to turn up.

Johnson said the last that was heard of Park, he was holed up in his Seoul residence, and that there were rumours that he had been placed under house arrest.

I wonder what happened to him in the end. People who know too much seldom fare well.

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Part 8: The Mission of KAL 007.

Having laid out all the facts in the case of KAL 007, it's time we laid out a possible hypothesis that might explain what it was doing. Obviously, it's virtually impossible to believe that the plane was astray by accident, and it's just as impossible to believe that the CIA and the US government was not involved in its final journey. But what, precisely, would its mission have been?

Section 1: The Passive Probe Hypothesis.

Suppose, Johnson argues, that the US had decided to try and trigger Soviet radars in order to get their bandwidths, especially the giant Kranoyarsk radar; and that this had become urgently necessary in order to find a pretext to stop disarmament talks. To do this, some way would have to be found to compel the Russians to turn on the radar. A major intrusion, passing over vital defence installations, could do the trick. A military aircraft would be something the Soviets would be expecting, and, besides, could be intercepted; and, if captured or destroyed, the US would find it impossible to explain away as anything but a provocation that went awry.

However, if a civilian plane was used, even if it were intercepted and forced down, it could be explained away as a flight that went astray. If an American civilian flight was used, of course it would be extremely suspicious, and, besides, US civilian pilots who flew this route weren't military or CIA and could be expected to talk.

The situation was, of course, quite different with the military dictatorship of South Korea, with its airline which was already in an incestuous relationship with the CIA and the KCIA, and whose pilots were mostly ex military in any case. The obvious answer would be to use the KAL for the job.

Oh, and the passengers? They were to be camouflage, as it were; not exactly human shields, because in Johnson's model, nothing was to be expected to actually happen to them. If directly challenged, the pilot would have been under orders to obey Soviet instructions and land at once. But with a little judicious radar jamming, there was no reason why anything should happen.

For this task, a crack crew would have been assembled, men with the greatest experience. In case something happened to any of them – heart attacks or sudden illness are not unknown even in mid air – not one but two backup crews were loaded. The pilot would have calculated the actual route he intended to take, not the fake one; and loaded extra fuel for the extra distance he'd need to fly. As described, he'd report false waypoints, via KAL 015; and the meeting with the (to the Russians) known RC 135 would be meant, as described, to merge the two images so that when they separated nobody on Kamchatka could tell which was which.

Johnson says, quite persuasively, that 007 would not have carried any surveillance equipment of its own. The reason is that if it were, like 902, forced down, this surveillance equipment would be impossible to explain away. Nor could it have been hidden, since of course the Soviets would have searched the plane almost with a microscope. So, it would, he says, have to be a passive probe, with other platforms picking up the signals.

In all probability, Johnson speculates, the second intrusion – the one over Sakhalin – was necessitated by the fact that the Soviets had not turned on their full radar network over Kamchatka; in fact, if they had, it's difficult to see how 007 could have avoided being intercepted there itself. In fact, but for Osipovich's great flying skill and luck in visually finding 007, it might have got away there as well.

Why didn't 007 obey Osipovich's attempts to communicate? By then, as we've said, Chun was within a minute's flight time to international airspace. He more than likely imagined that his evasive tactics would get him away to safety. He just got overconfident. After all, he'd already outmanoeuvred the Russians for hours. What was just one single minute more?

That is Johnson's solution. I, however, have one possible one of my own to offer.

Section 2: The Active Probe Hypothesis.

It is an interesting thing how opinions change as one discovers more facts. Before I began writing this article, before I even read Johnson's book, I had, quite independently of him, arrived at the passive probe solution. However, I am no longer a hundred per cent sure.

Unlike Johnson, who quite explicitly says he did not use any Soviet sources in his book, Takahashi has no such inhibition; and *he* charges that before the flight, 007 had been taken to a base in the US and fitted with surveillance equipment. Johnson rejects, of course, any such possibility; but just suppose if it were true? Suppose this chance to overfly Khabarovsk naval base was too much of a golden opportunity to let pass without gathering as much more extra information as could be obtained? A plane flying directly overhead, after all, can get more data than another far away, even if the one far away is more capable.

This equipment might be fairly bulky. How bulky I couldn't say, but perhaps bulky enough that it would lead to the pilot's cancelling already scheduled cargo that was to be loaded at Anchorage; the cancellation of which is something Johnson's hypothesis can't adequately explain.

If it were true, of course, then there would have to be some way to ensure that the equipment could not fall into Soviet hands. Some kind of self-destruct mechanism, perhaps, just as was fitted to...oh, hey, remember Francis Gary Powers and his U2? Only, the Powers experience had shown that one couldn't depend on the man on the spot obeying orders when the time came. And nobody in the plane, of course, would have had any intention of committing suicide. So, the bomb would have to be triggered by remote control in case there was any real possibility of the aircraft falling into Soviet hands.

Now can we find an explanation of why 007 seemed to have exploded so spectacularly, even if – going by the American claim of a slow spiralling descent – it shouldn't have blown up at all? Can we then understand why the wreckage would have been in multiple fragments, and the corpses blasted apart?

Even if Chun had followed orders to land, there would have been a sudden massive explosion, and the USSR would have been blamed. Who would ever have believed that they hadn't shot the plane down?

This also handily explains two other things that have been bothering me. One is the fact that the American ships allegedly failed to find any wreckage. Of course they found it; they'd have quietly salvaged all they could, so as to remove the signs of the surveillance equipment. If it were a passive probe, apart from the black boxes, it would be nonsensical to deny having found wreckage at all.

The second thing is the extra air hostesses and stewards KAL 007 loaded at Anchorage. The extra cockpit crews are explainable; but why were these three to five cabin crew aboard, especially in a plane a third empty? Johnson doesn't attempt to answer this question, but if they were actually not cabin crew at all, if they were operators of the clandestine electronic equipment, then it makes sense...again.

"But," the reader might exclaim at this point, "that means the US was ready to sacrifice the lives of the crew and passengers, totally ruthlessly! How could that be?"

My answer is, the US actually had planned to create faux terrorist attacks on its own territory, killing Americans, in order to justify an invasion of Cuba; *Americans*, not mere Asian vassals like the KAL passengers. Look it up if you don't believe me; it was called Operation Northwoods[24]. It's not a "conspiracy theory"; it's cold hard fact. And that's without going into the lies that went into the invasion of Iraq and other shenanigans without end, then and now.

When it comes to ruthlessness and hypocrisy, there is absolutely no equal in the world to the government of the United States of America.

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Part 9: Conclusion.

"**W**hy," readers might ask, "are you bringing up all this now? Isn't the Cold War long over, and isn't this all ancient history?"

My answer, again, would be: “Are you out of your minds?”

In 2014, the blood-soaked war criminal Barack Hussein Obama and his minions launched a corporatist-Nazi coup in Ukraine. Shortly after, the ethnic Russian population of the east of the country, unwilling to live under Nazis, seceded and took up arms. And as the regime launched a “punitive expedition” against them, a Malaysian airliner, MH 17, was mysteriously shot down...by *somebody*. As everyone knows, the BSWCBH Obama used this opportunity to launch a smear campaign against Russia. And, on cue, propaganda purveyors at once dug up the 007 story – or, rather, the 007 myth, the one which said it was an innocent gone astray – as proof that the damned Russians were brutal murderers[25]. The simple fact that they provided absolutely not the slightest smidgen of proof to back up these accusations – and have not to this day, nearly a year and a half later – took back seat to the propaganda offensive. And, unlike Reagan, who knew when to quit, the BSWCBH Obama and his minions show no signs of letting up, even when the campaign of lies and calumny have long since passed the point of diminishing returns.

It’s time to set the record straight about the earlier lies, so that nobody has an excuse to be taken in again.

I’ll end by quoting a passage from the end of Takahashi’s book, where he quotes Pablo Dreiger, writing in the Paris *Liberation*:

“Like all other people throughout the world, I also think that mankind can be divided into the following two categories: those who to some extent combine in themselves both good and evil, and the cruel, bloodthirsty monsters – Soviet people. Like all the others I am convinced that the South Korean Boeing had mistakenly strayed into Soviet airspace and for over two hours flew haphazardly above secret military bases. That happened because all the plane’s navigation systems broke down and because the crew took sleeping pills after the plane’s take off. I also think the Soviet military pilot identified the South Korean plane, whereas the latter failed to spot the Soviet fighter aircraft though the latter repeatedly positioned itself ahead, behind and parallel to the South Korean airliner. Like all the rest, I believe that the South Korean crew was unable, throughout the time it was inside Soviet airspace, to make radio contact with the Soviet military pilot or with US and Japanese air traffic control centres because all of the South Korean plane’s radio equipment had broken down. Only when it was hit by a Soviet missile all the disabled equipment suddenly came to life, enabling the South Korean pilot to send his last radio message.

“And, surely, I believe that Santa Claus exists.”

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