



## Thirty Years Later

### What Became of KAL 007?

Thirty years ago the Soviets mortally wounded a passenger jet that carried Congressman Larry McDonald. The Soviets claimed that everyone died, but there's always been doubt.

by Warren Mass

On September 1, 1983, early reports began coming in from Asia about the disappearance of a Korean Airlines flight, which indicated that it had been *forced* down off the east coast of the Soviet Union. As the *New York Times* noted that day: “Early reports said the plane ... had been forced down by Soviet Air Force planes and that all 240 passengers and 29 crew members were believed to be safe.” Subsequent reports, of course, said that the ill-fated passenger airliner had been *shot* down.

It did not take long for the media to report that among the passengers on the plane, KAL 007, was Congressman Larry McDonald (D-Ga.) — who at the time was chairman of The John Birch Society (the parent organization of THE NEW AMERICAN.) (See article on Page 31.)

U.S. news broadcasts the evening of the disappearance of KAL 007 reported that the missing aircraft had landed safely on Sakhalin Island, just a few miles across the Strait of Tartary and the Sea of Japan from the Siberian mainland.

C. K. Suh, manager of the American

Regional Office of Korean Air Lines in Los Angeles, phoned Congressman McDonald's press aide, Tommy Toles, telling him that he had “just called Korean Air Lines in Seoul” and that “the information I got from them is that [the] U.S. Embassy in Korea informed the Korean Government, Minister of Foreign Affairs ... that the plane has landed in Sakhalin.”

However, by the following morning, the media almost unanimously reported that the plane had been destroyed by one or more air-to-air missiles fired by a Soviet Su-15 Flagon interceptor.

Because of the vested interest among some parties, particularly the Soviets, in covering up the facts related to this case, it might be impossible to ever learn the truth. However, by carefully studying the sequence of events leading up to, and following, the attack on KAL 007, we may arrive at a plausible conclusion that differs considerably from the official version.

#### **KAL 007: The Flight**

KAL 007 originated in New York and was destined for Seoul, the capital of South Korea. The plane made a refueling stop in Anchorage, Alaska, before continuing on.

As noted earlier, the most prominent passenger aboard the flight was Rep. Larry McDonald, the outspoken constitutionalist Democrat from Georgia. Following the same path and flying just 15 minutes behind the flight was another Korean airliner, KAL 015. Aboard the second flight were Senators Jesse Helms of North Carolina and Steven Symms of Idaho, along with Representative Carroll J. Hubbard, Jr. of Kentucky. All of these U.S. congressional members had been invited to Seoul to attend the ceremonies for the 30th anniversary of the U.S.-Korea Mutual Defense Treaty.

Both KAL flights stopped at Anchorage at the same time, and passengers had the option of remaining on board or waiting in the terminal. McDonald decided to stay on board and catch up on his sleep, but Senator Helms opted to visit the terminal, where he mingled with passengers from KAL 007. During the layover, Helms met two little girls who were passengers on McDonald's plane, Noel Anne Grenfell, five, and her sister Stacy Marie, three.

During the memorial service for McDonald held in Washington, D.C., 10 days following the attack, attended by 4,000 people, Helms told his story:

I'll never forget that night when that plane was just beside ours at Anchorage airport with two little girls and their parents. I taught them, among other things, to say I love you in deaf [sign] language, and the last thing they did when they turned the corner was stick up their little hands and tell me they loved me.

Few who heard the story forgot it, and there was not a dry eye in the house.

Following that layover, KAL 007 resumed its flight toward Seoul, with KAL 015 following. Transoceanic airplanes do not fly randomly over the seas, but are assigned to highways in the air that are numbered, much like our Interstate highways. KAL 007's airway, R-20 (Romeo 20) would take it just 17.5 miles east of Soviet airspace off the Kamchatka coast of Siberia.

For reasons that are not entirely known, KAL 007 began deviating from its flight path early in the flight, drifting further and further off course to the west. Later analysis of the aircraft's flight data record suggested that the aircraft's auto pilot system was operating in the wrong mode, compromising the system's ability to keep the plane on course.

By the time KAL 007 reached the Siberian coast, it was 160 nautical miles off course and, instead of heading southward toward Japan, was veering southwestward across the Kamchatka Peninsula. The Soviets scrambled two jets to intercept the Boeing 747, but failed to reach it before it crossed over the peninsula back into international airspace over the Sea of Okhotsk.

According to some reports, the Soviets had maintained a heightened alert in the area around the Kamchatka Peninsula that day because they had scheduled a test of a RT-2PM Topol missile, which was to have been launched from Plesetsk, in the north-west Soviet Union, and fired to the Klyuchi target area on the Kamchatka Peninsula.

During that time period, the United States routinely sent specially configured planes with distinctive black noses and externally mounted antennas, known as the RC-135S Cobra Balls, to probe and test Soviet air defense on the Kamchatka Peninsula. It so happened that an RC-135S was flying off the peninsula the same time KAL 007 crossed it, gathering electronic data. From that position, and with its sophisticated equipment, it would be highly likely that the RC-135S would have picked up the off-course Korean Airlines plane and also the "lighting up" of Soviet air defense radar. And yet, probably to cloak its own presence, the RC-135S did not warn the civilian airliner that it had strayed across Soviet territory.

However, the Soviets were aware of the presence of the RC-135S and later offered as justification for the shooting down of KAL 007 that it had mistaken the Boeing 747 for the RC-135S. While this may have been the case for radar operators on the ground, once the Soviet pilot made visual contact, it is highly unlikely that he would have confused the two planes. The Boeing

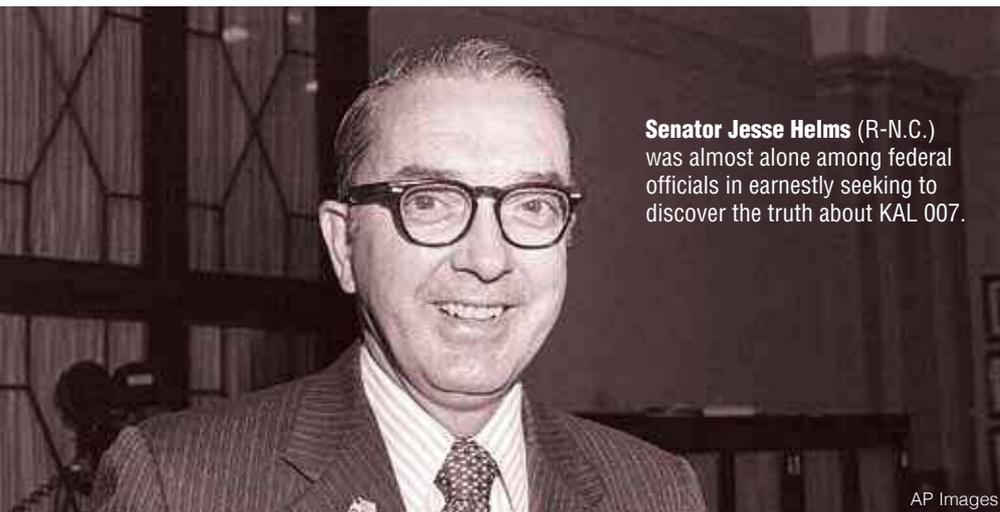
A minute after Osipovich had announced the destruction of the plane, another Soviet pilot radioed, "No, I don't see it," and Osipovich said, "I don't see anything in this area. I just looked."

RC-135S is just over 136 feet in length, with a wingspan of 130 feet, and a tail height of 41 feet. As noted, it has a distinctive black nose. The Boeing 747-230B, in contrast, is 231 feet, with a wingspan of 195 feet and a tail height of 63 feet. Furthermore, with its double-deck configuration and distinctive fuselage "hump," the 747 presents a silhouette unlike any other aircraft in the skies.

An exchange of communications between General Valeri Kamensky, the commander of the Soviet Far East District Air Defense Forces, and his subordinate, General Anatoli Kornukov, commander of Sokol Air Base, revealed a difference of opinion about how much verification was required before destroying the aircraft. A monitored radio transmission recorded Kamensky as stating: "We must find out, maybe it is some civilian craft or God knows who." General Kornukov defiantly replied: "What civilian? [It] has flown over Kamchatka! It [came] from the ocean without identification. I am giving the order to attack if it crosses the State border."

An article in the *New York Times* of December 9, 1996, quoted Major Gennadi Osipovich, the pilot of the Su-15 interceptor that fired on the plane: "From the flashing lights and the configuration of the windows, he recognized the aircraft as a civilian type of plane.... 'I saw two rows of windows and knew that this was a Boeing,' he said. '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.' Osipovich continued: 'I did not tell the ground that it was a Boeing-type plane; they did not ask me.'"

After flying past KAL 007, which had reduced its speed as it ascended to a higher altitude, Osipovich approached the airliner from the rear, 2,000 meters below the 747. He fired two Kaliningrad R-8 missiles at the plane, after which he reported starkly: "The target is destroyed."



**Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.)** was almost alone among federal officials in earnestly seeking to discover the truth about KAL 007.

But was KAL-007 destroyed, or merely crippled? A minute after Osipovich had announced the destruction of the plane, another Soviet pilot radioed, “No, I don’t see it,” and Osipovich said, “I don’t see anything in this area. I just looked.”

Less than one minute prior to Osipovich’s message that the target had been destroyed (and 39 seconds after the attack), air traffic controllers in Tokyo received a message from Captain Chun of KAL 007 that the plane was flying at “fifteen thousand ... holding with the rapid decompressions. Descending to one zero thousand [10,000 feet].” This would have been standard procedure for an aircraft whose cabin had depressurized, since pressurization is required at altitudes of above 12,500 feet.

In his article “KAL007 Remembered: The Questions Remain Unanswered,” in *THE NEW AMERICAN* for September 10, 1991, Robert W. Lee observed that it was strange that there was no discernible “Mayday” emergency transmission from the airliner. Lee cited an article in the *Nation* magazine for August 17/August 24, 1985, that quoted Dr. Malcolm Brenner of Aviation Safety Associates International (described as “a leading firm in the aviation accident investigation field”), who said that “there is a saying in aviation that ‘one minute’s flying is worth two days’ rowing,’” and for aircraft over water it would be critical to get the Mayday message started as soon as possible and lasting as long as possible.

The ground station could then use the radio signal to take a fix on the aircraft’s location and likely ditching site.”

Lee noted that the relatively slow rate of descent of KAL 007 following the attack indicated that the plane was still under some control, and was inconsistent with the plane being destroyed by the missiles. He wrote: “Compelling evidence indicates that the jetliner remained airborne for at least 12 minutes after the attack.... And to date, no one has adequately explained how a jetliner supposedly blown up and hurtling out of control toward the sea could take 12-plus minutes to fall 35,000 feet.”

Lee also pointed out obvious inconsistencies between the supposed point of impact of KAL 007 reported by the Soviets — and also those calculated by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the U.S. Navy — and the distance the plane would have traveled in order to remain aloft for 12 minutes. All of these locations are from 19 to 45 miles off Sakhalin Island.

The problem lies in the distance a 747 would have traveled in order to remain in flight for 12 minutes, starting from its air-speed of 540 miles per hour at the time of the attack. Applying a little mathematics, and using the most conservative of figures, Lee pointed out: “During 12 minutes, unless it changed direction, it would have traveled 72 miles, placing it about 84 miles — not 19 or 45 — from the shore of Sakhalin.”

Notice that Lee allows for the excep-

tion to the plane’s projected path, “*unless it changed direction.*” If Captain Chun had enough control of the plane to change direction, the point of impact (even controlled landing) might have been closer to the starting point. As we noted in our previous article for *THE NEW AMERICAN* of September 1, 2008:

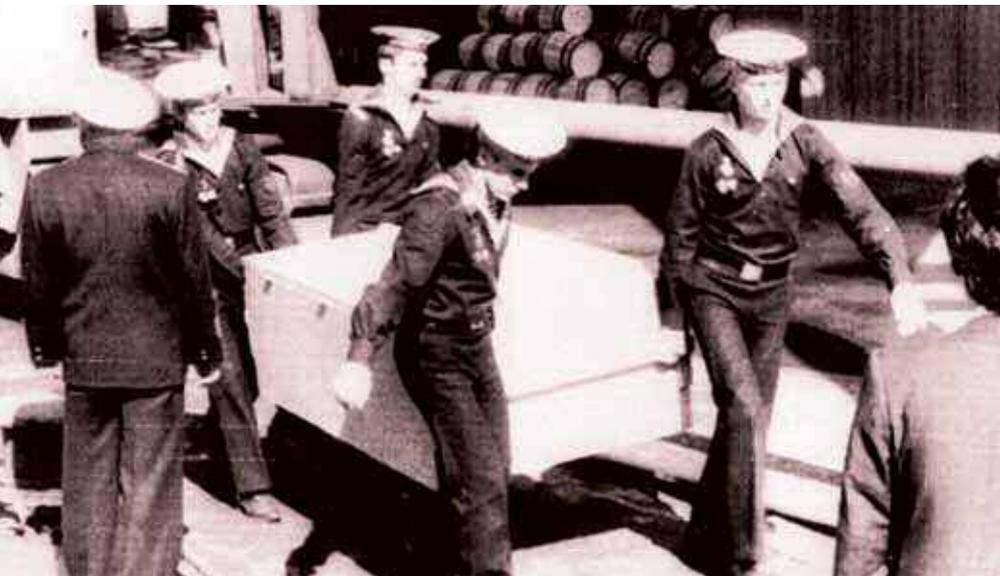
When Soviet General Kornukov was informed that the plane had changed course to the north he was incredulous....

Kornukov then ordered that a MIG 23 be brought in to finish the job. However, due to KAL 007’s descent and heavy cloud cover, they could not locate the plane. The Soviet interceptors, low on fuel, returned to their base without having sighted the plane. The Soviets’ radar told them, however, that the plane had descended to 16,424 feet and was flying a spiral pattern over Moneron Island, in the Tartar Strait 24 miles west of Sakhalin Island.

Finally, 12 minutes after the attack, KAL 007 disappeared from radar, after dipping below the 1,000-foot level near Moneron Island. The Soviets immediately dispatched squadrons of KGB Border Guard boats, rescue helicopters, and even civilian trawlers to Moneron Island.

This scenario suggests that the pilot of the plane had enough control of the aircraft to deliberately bring it down in close proximity to Moneron Island. Recalling the flight of United Airways Flight 1549 (the incident known as the “Miracle on the Hudson”) and Captain Chesley Sullenberger’s landing of the plane on the water without the loss of a single life, it seems plausible that Capt. Chun might have set KAL 007 down in shallow waters off Moneron. If so, what happened to the passengers?

While writing our earlier article in 2008, we contacted Bert Schlossberg, who had done extensive research into the fate of the Korean airliner in preparing his book, *Rescue 007: The Untold Story of KAL 007 and Its Survivors*. His interest in the tragedy was prompted by the fact that his wife’s father and cousin, Alfredo Cruz and Edith Cruz, were passengers on the plane. Schlossberg had immigrated to



**After shooting down KAL 007** the Soviets turned over debris from the plane, but they did not turn over bodies of the passengers or crew.

The “Tower of Prayer” monument commemorating KAL Flight 007, is located at Cape Soya, Japan, the closest point outside of Russian territory to the place where the plane is presumed to have gone down.



Israel about 20 years earlier and settled in a small community north of Jerusalem, where he came to know a man named Avraham Shifrin quite well. Shifrin, a former major in the Soviet army and criminal investigator in the Krasnodor area of the Crimea, had been employed at the Soviet Ministry of Weapons before becoming a slave-labor prisoner.

Shifrin explained during an interview while on an extensive speaking tour in the United States sponsored by The John Birch Society in 1983-84: “Because I was the chief legal advisor in the [Soviet] Ministry of War Equipment, I have many contacts. When I was in prison, my friends became important in the war industry.”

In 1991, Shifrin, after analyzing much information he had gathered from his old Soviet contacts, issued a press release saying his investigation into the fate of the KAL 007 passengers indicated that many, including Rep. Larry McDonald, had been secretly kidnapped and were being held by the Soviet Union.

Because of his close association with Shifrin, Schlossberg became privy to much of the information the former had collected, information he believed must be made more widely known. He became director of an organization formed in 2001, the International Committee for the Rescue of KAL 007 Survivors, Inc., whose mission is “to uncover and disseminate the truth about the KAL 007 incident and to effect the rescue and return home of its survivors.”

When we spoke with Schlossberg in 2008, he was so eager to share his knowledge of Flight 007 with us that we had space to quote only a small part of that interview. However, some key points included:

- “[The investigative findings of] Avraham Shifrin [were] conveyed to Jesse Helms, and to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. And Jesse said the CIA could verify the materials and they did verify the most important part of what Avraham Shifrin was receiving — that the plane had landed and landed on the water.”

- Shifrin’s report to Sen. Helms, “because it indicated that there was a probability of survivors ... encouraged Jesse Helms to write to [Russian President] Boris Yeltsin.... Yeltsin came forth with ... the real-time Russian military communications, during shoot-down, after shoot-down.”

These communications indicated that reports of the Soviet interceptor’s missiles taking out the plane’s left wing and an engine were impossible, because the plane could not have flown without a wing and — furthermore — Capt. Chun had reported twice back after the fact, “All engines normal, Sir.”

- “Helms also asked in that letter for the locations of the camps where the passengers were kept, he asked for the fate of Larry McDonald, he asked for all the Russian military communications, the radio tracks, etc., and Yeltsin would reply to everything except about the passengers.”

- When we asked Schlossberg to comment about sightings of Flight 007 passengers from people in prison camps, he replied: “A Russian pastor who was in a Soviet prison ... [said] there were a whole bunch of Westerners who came into that prison the same week as the shoot-down, dressed in civilian clothes.... The report that came in to Avraham was that the passengers were taken off the plane by the patrol boats and they were brought to Sakhalin and at Sakhalin they were separated into groups. The children were brought over to the mainland and the children were basically distributed for adoption.”

- Schlossberg’s next comment was dramatic for all who admired Congressman Larry McDonald: “Larry McDonald has the most tracking. It’s still not on the level of hard evidence, but credible evidence, meaning it is something that has got to be checked on by somebody who has the means to follow it through. According to our reports, McDonald wound up in Lubyanka [KGB prison] and was interrogated by Vladimir Kryuchkov, the head of the First Chief Directorate of the KGB. He was taken to Lefortovo KGB prison, also in Moscow, and then taken to Sukhanova, to a dascha [summer house], where he was interrogated under drugs, and the report from there was that he no longer had an identity, they robbed him of his ability to know who he was. Eventually he was taken to Karaganda, which is a transit prison, in Kazakhstan. Of course at that time, Kazakhstan was part of the Soviet Union. And that was the last tracking of him, at a prison north of Karaganda, called Temir Tau.”

Given the limited amount of intelligence that is available from the Russian government and our own, we do not presently have the means to confirm whether all passengers aboard KAL 007 were lost, as has been generally reported, or were picked up and detained by the Soviets and their Russian successors.

In June 2012, a petition drive was begun to reopen the investigation into reports of the survival of the flight’s passengers.

The petition may be read by visiting: <http://www.change.org/petitions/president-barack-obama-speaker-of-the-house-john-boehner-conduct-an-investigation-of-flight-kal-007> ■