

EDITORIAL

The ill-fated 747 and the military mind

Saying it is unfortunate that the Soviets destroyed the Korean 747 jet and its innocent passengers is certainly an understatement. Outrageous is a more appropriate word. Passenger planes need an assurance of immunity from aggression on a global basis.

Commercial aircraft on routine scheduled flights might, at times, need to be escorted from critical military air space particularly if they wander off course. Initially, that may have been the intent of the fighter pilots who rose to meet the 747's intrusion. Strong similarity in the appearance of the Korean jet and planes the United States uses for reconnaissance could account for mistaken identity, but once the plane had identified itself, it is difficult to understand the attack.

Remaining are questions about why the aircraft departed from the course it was supposed to follow and, instead, took a direct route to Seoul after leaving Anchorage, Alaska, a route that brought it over Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula and the military installation there. That course did shorten the flight by approximately 500 miles, though; perhaps the pilot gambled the Russians wouldn't shoot; if so, he lost. Three separate computer systems aboard his aircraft should have provided more than adequate navigational direction, even if one of them failed. Possibly all three computers were incorrectly programmed, although that seems unlikely.

In any case, the incident illustrates the mindlessness of military organizations. These entities are like giant insects, programmed to leap, bite, or sting in an unthinking response, more like a reflex action. This is a characteristic not limited exclusively to the Soviets.

Do you remember the United States' destroyer **Blue**? A little over forty years ago, during the early months of World War II, the U.S.S. **Blue** was blown out of the water off Sandy Hook, just outside New York Harbor. The U.S.S. **Blue**, when entering New York Harbor, did not have the correct pass-

word. Coast artillery batteries at New York's Fort Hamilton "followed orders" and opened fire with their large-caliber, coastal defense guns. Marksmanship was excellent.

The **Blue** sank on the spot. Loss of life was heavy. To make matters worse, this occurred at a time when we had urgent need of every warship we could press into service since almost the entire American fleet had been sunk by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Not much was made of the incident because the country was in the frenzy of war, but it did happen, and it did happen in precisely this way. This is the military mind. This is the universal military mind (or mindlessness, depending on your point of view).

Only a few years ago, the Israelis shot down an unarmed 727 passenger jet, killing all on board. It, too, had strayed into "restricted air space." And, although the disaster was widely reported in our press, not much outrage surfaced because the media "party line" at that time was pretty well cast in an "Israelis can do no wrong" mold.

To put this subject in proper perspective, it is vital that people everywhere recognize that the military mind can be dangerous. The military mind is a viper in our midst. The military mind does not reason; it obeys orders unquestioningly.

It is unnecessary to elaborate upon the ways in which some military "mantiss" mentality might "follow orders" and, by simply pushing a button, destroy the human race. We know all it takes is one nuclear warhead en route to (or from) Russia to loose a rain of them across the northern hemisphere.

Put one and one together, and come up with two: the implications of the destruction of the Korean passenger plane are clear. Do we want, really, to spend more money on "defense"?