

KAL 007, the U.S. Seventh Fleet, and the Great Russian Ruse

I – The Mirage

October 17, 1983

The new commander of U.S. Seventh Fleet Task Force 71 stood on the bridge staring deeply into the dark in the direction of Moneron Island. Today, Rear Admiral William Cockell had been relieved of command of the Task Force and its Search and Rescue mission, now reclassified (as of September 10th) as Search and Salvage – all hope for survivors from Korean Air Lines Flight 007 was gone. He, Rear Admiral Walter T. Piotti, Jr., was now in command.



Rear Admiral Walter T. Piotti

On September 1st, Korean Air Lines Flight 007 had departed from Anchorage, Alaska and strayed deep into Soviet territory over the Kamchatka Peninsula and its sensitive military facilities. It then crossed over the Sea of Okhotsk and was leaving Russian airspace over Sakhalin Island – just across the Tatar Strait from Siberia – when it was shot down. Now, the Russians and they were competing to be the first (and the only ones) to recover the flight's "Black Boxes", the Cockpit Voice Recorder and the Digital Flight Data Recorder. These were expected to provide evidence that would either confirm or refute the accusation that KAL 007 was on a U.S. spy mission.

"They" were the United States, Japan and South Korea. Immediately after the downing, South Korea, as owners of KAL 007, designated the United States and Japan as their agents for the Search and Salvage operations. This meant that Soviet salvage would be illegal and allow for

the U.S. to use force against the Soviets if they did, indeed, attempt salvage operations outside their own territorial waters – off Sakhalin and around tiny Moneron Island.

Commander Piotti thought hard about this matter. Vladimir Pavlov, Soviet Ambassador to Japan, had come across with the Soviet coordinates for the probable crash site. Task Force 71 was now conducting its search within those coordinates – an area comprising 225 square miles of international waters to the north and northwest of Moneron. But why were the Soviets concentrating most of their search within their own territorial waters?

There, beyond Commander Piotti's vision, but in the direction of Moneron, was the main Soviet salvage ship, the *Mikhail Mirchink*. Designated an S.P.D., Self Propelled Drill ship, the *Mirchink* was a Swedish built vessel having the great advantage of being able, thanks to its gyros, to stabilize itself dynamically over one spot, regardless of wind or waves.



The Mikhail Merchink

Commander Piotti knew that the *Mirchink* was positioned within Soviet waters about eleven nautical miles north of Moneron and that nineteen underwater operations had been performed from her decks. He did not know that the divers working off the *Mirchink* had been flown, immediately after the shootdown, by helicopter from their deep-sea assignment off the shores of Murmansk on the Kola Peninsula in northwest Russia and then by transport to the port of Kholmsk on the island of Sakhalin for their "Flight 007" assignment.

He also knew of the *Hydronaut*, a combined search and fishing boat, which was mother ship to two small two-man submersibles, the *Tinro 2* and the *Okeanolog*. He did not know that its divers

had also been hastily flown, this time from Crimean Sevastopol on the Black Sea shores of the Ukraine. And he knew of the *Georgi Kozmin* with its two manned and two unmanned submersibles. He did not know that the *Georgi Kozmin* divers had come from Soviet Gavan, the main naval port across the Tatar Straits from Sakhalin and that all these divers were naval, working separately, and, for the most part, prior to the two civilian groups. Had he known, he might well have pondered the reason for the separation in time and place between the military and civilian divers. He might have pondered the natures of their respective operations.



The Georgi Kozmin

In the now unclassified “Surface Combatant Forces – 7th Fleet Task Force 71 Flight 007 After-Action Report”, dated November 18, 1983, Commander Piotti would summarize the Soviets’ Search and Salvage operations:

“Within six days of the downing of KAL 007, the Soviets had deployed six ships to the general crash site area. Over the next 8 weeks of observation by U.S. naval units this number grew to a daily average of 19 Soviet naval, naval-associated and commercial (but undoubtedly naval-subordinated) ships in the Search and Salvage (SAS) area. The number of Soviet ships in the SAS area over this period ranged from a minimum of six to a maximum of thirty-two and included at least forty-eight different ships comprising forty different ship classes.”

This was a formidable naval array, indeed!



USCG Cutter Monro (official USCG photo)

On the U.S. side, as far as the SAS vessels were concerned, there were three U.S. ships – the Coast Guard cutter *Monro*, the rescue salvage ship *USS Conserver*, and the Fleet Tug *USNS Narrangansett*. There were also three Japanese tugs chartered through the U.S. Navy’s Far East Salvage Contractor (Selco) – the *Ocean Bull*, the *Kaiko-Maru 7*, and the ill-fated *Kaiko-Maru 3*.

These vessels, which housed navigation systems equipment, had the assignment of towing sideways scanning sonars designed to detect objects at the bottom of the sea such as the wreckage of Korean Air Lines Flight 007. They also served as launch platforms for unmanned “deep drones” designed to investigate whatever the side scanners detected. And then there was the all important “pinger” locator that could pick up the pinging signal emitted by KAL 007’s “Black Boxes”. This signal could last thirty days.

Aside from these SAS vessels, there were the U.S. naval combatants and logistical support ships – the *USS Elliot*, *USS Badger*, *USS Sterrett*, *USNS Hassayampa*, *USS Callaghan*, *USS Brooke*, *USS Meyerkord*, *USS Tower*, *USS Stark* and the *USS Wichita*. In addition to the above ships, there were numerous Japanese Maritime Safety Agency (JMSA) patrol boats and South Korean vessels.

Commander Piotti’s assessment of the enormity of this naval undertaking: “Not since the search for the hydrogen bomb lost off Palmares, Spain has the U.S. Navy undertaken a search effort of the magnitude or import of the search for the wreckage of KAL Flight 007.”

But things had been taking a turn for the worse. Confrontations had occurred, threats had turned to deeds, weapons had been pointed and locked on, the nuclear specter had loomed becoming a distinct possibility – all over KAL 007's wreckage and its "Black Boxes"!



The destroyer in the above photo is the USS Elliott DD967

A sequence of events*:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 7 September | The <i>USS Elliot's</i> helicopter harassed by Soviet aircraft. |
| 15 September | The <i>USNS Narragansett</i> reported hazardous maneuvering by the Soviet ship <i>Alpinist</i> . |
| 18 September | The <i>Narragansett</i> harassed by the <i>Pegasus</i> . |
| 19 September | <i>USNS Conserver</i> operations met with interference from the <i>Gavril Sarychev</i> . The <i>USS Sterrett</i> met with interference from the <i>Pegasus</i> . |

* Cold War at Sea, David F. Winkler, U.S. Naval Institute Press, June 2000, pg. 47

- 23 September – The near collision of the *USS Callaghan* and the *Gavril Sarychev*.
- 27 September The Kashin class destroyer no. 660 interfered with the flight of a U.S. Navy helicopter. Radar lock-ons of U.S. Navy ships by the Kara class cruiser *Petropavlovsk* and the Kashin class destroyer *Odarennyy*.
- 26 October Soviet combatants criss-crossed in front of the *USS Tower* and the *Conserver*.

Commander Piotti would describe the provocative, obstructive and dangerous activities of the Soviets as follows:

“...maneuvers which prevented ships towing search sensors from making good their programmed search track, maneuvers with significant potential for cutting/fouling umbilicals of towed sensors or the deep drone and extremely close approaches to moored Japanese charter ships which their masters believed risked collision or damage to their moors (which in several cases did occur). It appeared at the time and remains so in retrospect, that the Soviets deliberately harassed and sought to intimidate the masters of the Japanese charter ships.”

“...close escorts [by U.S. combatants] including interposition in risk of collision situations was not sufficient to prevent the intimidation of the First Master of *Maru NR 3*, who twice slipped his moor rather than remain in what he considered a vulnerable position.”

The 1991 Republican Staff Study of the Committee on Foreign Relations would add to and amplify Commander Piotti’s list.

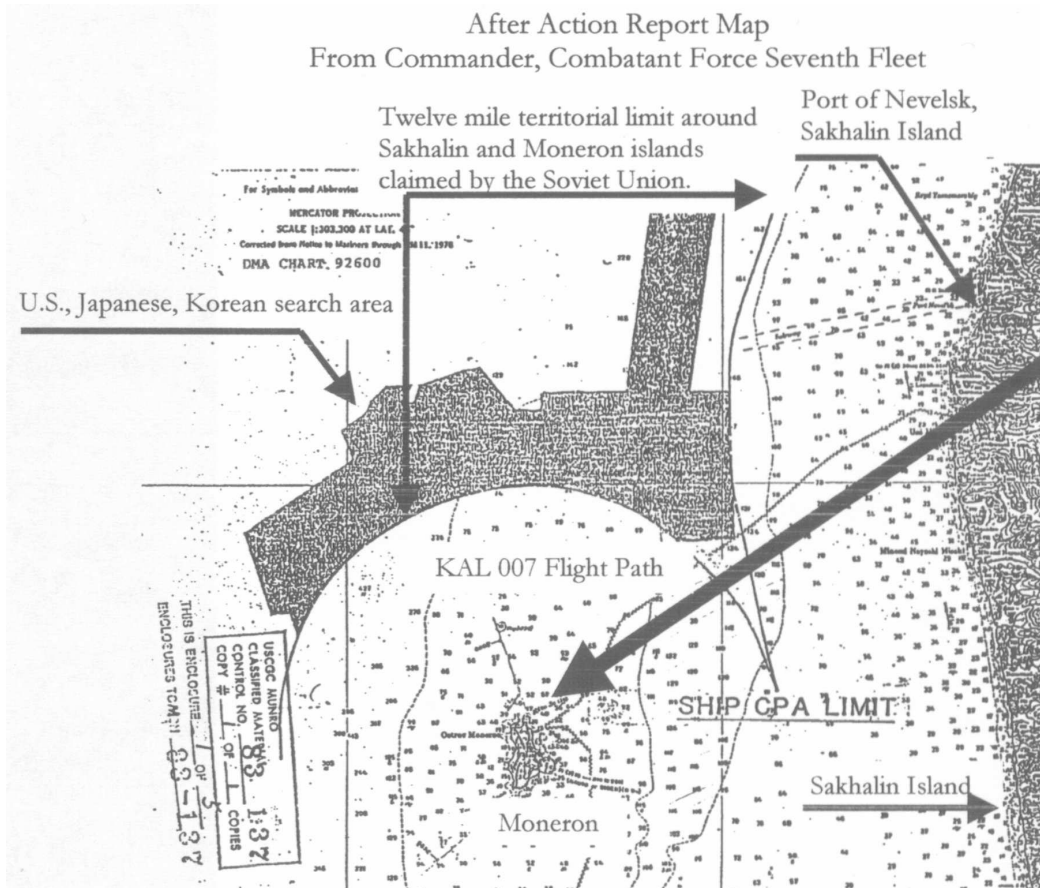
“Moreover, the Soviet Navy and auxiliary vessels committed many serious violations of the 1972 Incident at Sea Agreement... such as attempted ramming of several U.S. and allied ships, presenting false flag and fake light signals, locking on the radar guidance of their weapons... sending an armed boarding party to threaten to board a Japanese auxiliary vessel chartered by the U.S. They engaged in a naval live-firing exercise northwest of Moneron Island, and sent Backfire bombers armed with air-to-surface nuclear-armed missiles to threaten the U.S. Navy search task force... move(d) U.S. sonar markers... manipulated the U.S. Navy search efforts into searching for decoy “pingers” on the sea bottom in very deep, international waters.”

Piotti would conclude:

“Had TF [task force] 71 been permitted to search without restriction imposed by claimed territorial waters, the aircraft stood a good chance of having been found.”

“No wreckage of KAL 007 was found. However, the operation established, with a 95% or above confidence level, that the wreckage, or any significant portion of the aircraft,

does not lie within the probability area outside the 12 NM area claimed by the Soviets as their territorial limit.”



Search Area

But, had the commander been able to see deeply through the dark, past the twelve-mile limit of territorial waters claimed by the Soviets, past the *Mirchink* conducting its phoney salvage posturing, and to a point not far from the shores of tiny Moneron Island and then down through the shallow depths of the Tatar Straits between Moneron and Sakhalin that were now stirred up, he would have seen the Truth emerge. He would have learned why it was that neither KAL 007, nor its wreckage, nor its people, nor its luggage was to be found by a naval undertaking of such a “magnitude” and “import” that had not been seen “since the search for the hydrogen bomb lost off Palmares, Spain.”

II—The Reality Below

(The following section is from Rescue 007: The Untold Story of KAL 007 and Its Survivors, Bert Schlossberg, Xlibris, 2000, pages 82-92. Used with permission.)

KAL 007 From Below

“Remember that it took the downed plane about 10 minutes⁸⁸ to plunge toward the ocean. During this time, many passengers, if not all, put on their life vests. In addition, they certainly strapped themselves in with seat belts. No matter how hard the aircraft hit the water, it is difficult to imagine all 269 people disappearing without a trace. Some of the passengers should have been carried to the surface precisely by their life vests. Some should have remained at the bottom, strapped to the seats. All of them could not have disappeared.”

—James Oberg, former NASA official, specialist in crash analysis.

Not having the benefit of learning what subsequent Boeing 747 explosions and crashes at sea would provide (KAL 007 was the first Boeing 747 to allegedly explode and crash into the sea), and being convinced that KAL 007 had “cataclysmically” and “catastrophically” been “destroyed” in the air and had “cartwheeled,” “hurled earthward,” “whirled,” “plunged,” and “free-fallen” with “ever-increasing acceleration”⁸⁹ to its doom, many commentators have concluded that 269 corpses could be found incarcerated in a portion or portions of KAL 007’s fuselage, their underwater tomb.

Then a bomb shell went off, but almost inaudibly—deadened, as it were, as terrorist bombs are deadened when they are exploded before their time in the remote-controlled, steel-jawed containers of a bomb squad. The bomb shell came in the form of a series of articles, part interview, part analysis, published in the Soviet newspaper *Izvestiya* from December 1990 through June 1991, the subject of which was the KAL 007 shoot-down. The dulling and deadening container of the bomb shell’s blast was that investigators and the media soon realized that these articles had been published by a not-yet-free opinion-forming organ of the Communist regime, and was being used by the Soviets for disinformation purposes. Those among the general public who had been following events soon lost interest.

The genius of disinformation is to speak the truth—but in such a way that the fuller or the more threatening aspects of the truth not surface. Lies are ancillary. But below the surface of the waters off the coast of Sakhalin somewhere near the Island of Moneron, that fuller truth lies waiting.

Three diving groups have been documented, but there are indications that other groups were involved as well. The first of the three documented groups were the military divers assigned to the naval units on Soviet Gavan on the Siberian coast, across the Tatar Straits from Sakhalin Island. These naval divers operated two manned and two unmanned submersibles from their mother ship, the *Georgi Kozmin*.

⁸⁸ At least 12 minutes according to combined Soviet/Japanese radar trackings.

⁸⁹ Oft-repeated popular media characterization for KAL 007’s post-hit flight. See Appendix A for an explanation of the media’s initial propensity for such descriptions.

Second, there was the Murmansk group working from the Ministry of Oil drilling ship *Mikhail Mirchink*. The *Mirchink* was a Swedish-built ship that had the great advantage of being able to coordinate its position and then dynamically stabilize its position regardless of changing wind and water conditions, without the use of anchors. This ship was of central importance in recovering most of the debris from what was probably the main location of the downed, sunk, and exploded aircraft.

The third group was the Svestapol group operating from the combined search and fishing boat, the *Hydronaut*. The *Hydronaut* was mother vessel to two small two-man submersibles, the *Tinro 2* and the *Okeanolog*. Mikhail Igorevich Girs was the designer and captain of the *Tinro 2*, the submersible used most extensively by the Svestapol divers. The *Okeanolog* made only two dives.

Admiral Vladimir Vasilyevich Sidorov, Commander of the Soviet Pacific Fleet, directed the Soviet Salvage operations, having the civilian divers as well as the military under his direct command. Chief diver for the Murmansk group, but also involved with the Svestapol team, was Vladimir Vasilyevich Zakharchenko.⁹⁰ He chronicled the diving sessions.

The Svestapol group began diving on September 15, sometime after the military divers had descended. How much earlier the military had started its work is unknown—unknown, that is, as far as the *Izvestiya* series is concerned. However, according to reports of Soviet immigrants to Israel and elsewhere, referred to in the CIA Report/Republican Staff Study, it was immediately after being downed—and after Soviet Coast Guard ships under the command of KGB General Romanenko had removed passengers and luggage—that KAL 007 was “towed to Soviet territorial waters near Moneron, and deliberately sunk in shallow waters inside Soviet territorial limits.”⁹¹ It would have been possible, therefore, for Soviet military divers to have commenced their diving on September 1, the very day KAL 007 was shot-down.

The civilian divers knew that military divers had preceded them and understood, or were given to understand, that they (the civilian divers) were required because of their superior equipment.

As A. S. Torchinov, Chief of the Far Eastern Deep Water Drilling Administration and former KAL 007 “Murmansk Group” diver expresses it, “As for the divers, the military, of course, has its own underwater rescue service. But its maximum depth is 160 meters. And with the equipment the armed forces has cannot stay underwater for more than 15–20 minutes. And, judging from everything, the work takes a long time.

“So, having decided that they could not do the job with their own forces, the people in uniform began to recruit everyone they could into the search area.” The explanation that civilian divers were called in because the military divers had inadequate equipment seems plausible on the surface as the militaries of a number of countries invest neither manpower nor finances adequate for the relatively rare occurrences of deep water search and salvage. For example, Israel had hired an American company, “Nauticus,” which succeeded in April of 1999 in

⁹⁰ Vladimir Vasilyevich Zakharchenko, not to be confused with Admiral Vladimir Vasilyevich Sidorov.

⁹¹ CIA Report/Republican Staff Study report, p. 75.

locating its long lost submarine, “Dakar,” and has once again turned to Nauticus to locate wreckage and the “Black Boxes” of an F-16 that crashed and sank beneath the waters of the Mediterranean thirty kilometers west of Atlit on March 28, 2000. This civilian firm, Nauticus, has, to date, located for the various militaries of the world a total of twenty F-14s, F-15s and F-16s.

Yet, however plausible the explanation appears, the reports of KAL 007’s Soviet civilian divers suggests that the military equipment was, indeed, adequate for the task. But, that the task they accomplished was other than the task assigned to the civilian crews. The ensuing evidence of the Soviet civilian divers suggests that the task of the military vessels – and civilian vessels commandeered by the military – was, as strange as it may seem, primarily towing then sinking the downed airliner, and then exploding the now submerged airliner and dispersing its wreckage in order to simulate an aerial explosion which civilian divers could then be called to authenticate and corroborate. And so, the Soviet Union would escape incrimination.

Here then are the main findings of both military and civilian divers. The plane as viewed and searched by the military divers was basically integral and more in one piece – more structurally sound – than when the plane was later visited by the civilian divers. The description of the plane by the military divers as being “enterable” was so at variance with the plane as viewed later by the civilian divers that Captain Mikhail Igorevich Girs, Commander of the *Tinro 2* submersible, doubts their report.⁹²

“It was during one of these exchanges that we met the military divers.

“An entry in Captain Girs’ diary: ‘During the day, spent some time with the rescue divers. They clarified a lot of things, but it looks like our work is not over yet. They found the fuselage, closer to the tail, and there are many remains there. It was standing vertically between the reefs. They first lowered it down, and then got inside.’

“‘To be honest,’ continued Mikhail Igorevich, ‘I did not completely believe those divers. According to them, they found the tail part of the aircraft standing upright. But this is a very large fragment of the Boeing. They said that they found it in the reefs. I also went to the reefs, but there, too, I saw only small fragments – but they were everywhere. The biggest parts I encountered were the chassis, wheels, engines, and pieces of the aircraft body.’

Yet when questioning high ranking officers at Sokol Airbase on Sakhalin Island, correspondent Andrey Illesh found confirmation that at an early stage KAL 007 was integral enough to be climbed on.

“Specialists – navy men – had found the giant aircraft in the Sea of Japan. In addition, submariners (military also) had gone to the bottom and had ‘clambered’ all over KAL 007 top to bottom.”⁹³

⁹² *Izvestiya*, May 28, 1991, p. 8.

⁹³ *Izvestiya*, December 21, 1990, p. 12.

The military and civilian diving sessions at no time overlapped. When the military divers had concluded their work, the civilian divers began. The first of the civilian divers to descend were from the Svestapol group.

“The people from Svestapol told us that they had also been working at the bottom of the Sea of Japan. On top of that, even earlier than the divers from Murmansk!”⁹⁴

Diver Viyacheslav Popov informs us of the military’s prior work, and then in amazement he informs us of a reversal in procedures – a reversal that should not have occurred.

“The first submergence was on 15 September, two weeks after the aircraft had been shot down. As we learned then, before us the trawlers had done some ‘work’ in the designated quadrant. It is hard to understand what sense the military saw in the trawling operation. First drag everything haphazardly around the bottom by the trawls, and then send in the submersibles?... It is clear that things should have been done in the reverse order.”⁹⁵

But this “reversal” supports the contention that KAL 007’s final resting place was not its original placement, but that while still afloat, it had been towed from its original landing site and then sunk (and exploded); and then its wreckage dispersed to make it appear that a plane in disintegration had scattered its parts as it hurled earthward. Captain Girs confirms this general impression of secondary placement: “The impression is that all of this has been dragged here by trawl rather than falling down from the sky.”⁹⁶

By the end of September, the Soviet drilling ship *Mikhail Mirchink*, which possibly had been stationed and working east of Moneron off of Sakhalin Island, situated itself north of Moneron. Both civilian diving groups inspected, photographed, and recovered wreckage and debris from the Boeing 747. A full understanding of the fate of the 269 people requires a familiarity and appreciation of what these divers saw and – just as importantly – what they did not see. Their reactions to their underwater experience are equally informative, revealing both their expectations and the minds of those who prepared them for their underwater task. For these reasons, it is best to hear their descriptions and experiences from the watery environs, as reported in *Izvestiya*.

Viyacheslav Popov:

“I will confess that we felt great relief when we found out that there were no bodies at the bottom. Not only no bodies; there were also no suitcases or large bags. Sometimes the thought even occurred: Was it really a passenger plane, or is that a deception? I remember we put together this independent version (we had to explain the situation to ourselves somehow): they

⁹⁴ *Izvestiya*, May 27, 1991, p. 6.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Izvestiya*, May 28, 1991, p. 8.

did have an accident with a specific Boeing somewhere out there, but then they 'covered' it with this forgery – this spy plane."⁹⁷

Vladimir Bondarev:

"I discovered this human hand,' he extends a horrifying photo toward us [*Izvestiya's* reporters], 'during the second or third submergence – between 17 and 20 September. When I saw it, I decided to make sure that it was not a plaster cast – I asked the captain to zoom in on it. That was the only way to make sure that it could not be a fake.'"⁹⁸

Captain Mikhail Igorevich Girs:

"From Captain Girs' diary: 'Submergence 10 October. Aircraft pieces, wing spars, pieces of aircraft skin, wiring, and clothing. But – no people. The impression is that all of this has been dragged here by a trawl rather than falling down from the sky...'"⁹⁹

"So we were ready to encounter a virtual cemetery. But one submergence went by, then the second, and then the third... During the entire rather lengthy period of our work near Moneron, I and my people had maybe ten encounters with the remains of Boeing passengers. No more than that."¹⁰⁰

"Something else was inexplicable to us – zipped up clothes. For instance, a coat, slacks, shorts, a sweater with zippers – the items were different, but – zipped up and nothing inside. We came to this conclusion then: Most likely, the passengers had been pulled out of the plane by decompression and they fell in a completely different place from where we found the debris. They had been spread out over a much larger area. The current also did its work."

V. Zakharchenko, G. Matyevenko, V. Kondrabayev:

"We thought we would go down and see a cemetery... But... There were no bodies the first day or the next... We learned our way around. And when I saw some remains for the first time I was surprised but not frightened. And then we did find some bones. Two... I took them in my hand... Later I saw some human skin with hair, like a scalp. The hair was black... But when it was touched all this fell apart... I saw what I thought was a fist in a glove. And then, remember, we saw a torso without a head, wearing a jacket. And winding their way out from under the jacket were some white strands – apparently the remains of entrails..."¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ *Izvestiya*, May 27, 1991, p. 6.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Izvestiya*, May 28, 1991, p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ There is no way of ascertaining from this testimony if the "ten encounters" were with ten separate bodies or (more likely) ten encounters with a lesser number of bodies. It is entirely possible that these encounters were with fragments from the same individual.

¹⁰¹ In all the divers' reports, this is the only reference to a torso – that is, a body.

“I did not miss a single dive. I have quite a clear impression: The aircraft was filled with garbage, but there were really no people there. Why? Usually when an aircraft crashes, even a small one... As a rule there are suitcases and bags, or at least the handles of the suitcases.”¹⁰²

V. Zakharchenko:

“But the main thing was not what we had seen there but what we had not seen – the divers had found practically no human bodies or remains...”¹⁰³

“Well, we found some pants with holes in the knees, a belt – also torn, everything else intact. What does this say? A person was probably wearing these pants... Then when we returned to Murmansk, we started reading the newspapers - we found what they were writing especially interesting. I thought at that time – it is impossible to simulate the death of such a number of people... to organize their relatives who would be in mourning – in Korea, Thailand, the United States, Taiwan... You might be able to fake two or three – but two hundred or more?...”¹⁰⁴

“But there was no fire in the Boeing – that is for sure. Things were intact, although all thoroughly saturated with kerosene. So... you heard all kinds of talk among members of this expedition – like there were no people there, on this aircraft, that all this was a falsification. All in all, I too was of this opinion at first. Almost no traces indicating people there, except for personal effects. But there were personal effects! Judging from the clothing, clothing worn by people. Why? Because it was torn. The way I see it – the people were cut apart by fragments.”

“No, they were not looking for people at all. They were looking for something they feared more than the tears and the curses of those who lost their loved ones...”

“No, no one asked us to recover people’s remains. Only – components, tapes, documents, the black box.”¹⁰⁵

Based on the facts presented in this and in the previous chapter, we can now list the evidence for the successful rescue by the Soviets of at least 259 of the 269¹⁰⁶ passengers of KAL 007.

- Within 27 minutes of KAL 007’s landing on water, small Soviet craft were at the site – Admiral Sidorov.
- Contrary to all known passenger plane explosions in air/crashes at sea, bodies were not found floating on the surface of the sea.
- Contrary to all known passenger plane explosions in air/crashes at sea, suitcases were not found floating on the sea (KAL 007 would have carried over 450 suitcases in the cargo area).

¹⁰² “World Wide Issues,” February 6, 1991, p. 21.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ The ten passenger disparity takes into account the unlikely possibility that the divers’ ten encounters with the remains of Boeing passengers were with the remains of ten separate individuals.

- Contrary to all known passenger plane explosions in air/crashes at sea, and contrary to the egalitarian nature of midair explosions/crashes at sea, not one item of the 1,020 items recovered came from KAL 007's cargo area.
- There is evidence that KAL 007, or portions of it, may have been moved under the sea by the first diving team, that of the military, and by trawls, and then scattered in order to simulate crash debris dispersal.
- Contrary to what should have obtained in an aircraft explosion in the air, no aircraft wreckage recovered and no wreckage viewed under the sea by the divers evidenced burn marks.
- KAL 007 was viewed more or less intact under the water by the first diving team, the military divers.
- At an early stage, the military divers describe the fuselage as intact enough to be entered and even climbed upon "top to bottom."
- At a later stage, the civilian divers describe KAL 007 as being in pieces and fragments. This could only have occurred if there had been an underwater explosion.¹⁰⁷
- Divers report with astonishment the absence of bodies on board or in association with the sunken airliner. (But one diver reports seeing one decapitated torso – while not more than ten "encounters" with body fragments are noted throughout all of divers' reports.)
- Divers report with astonishment the absence of luggage aboard or in association with the sunken airliner. (But one diver reports seeing some suitcases.)
- Some civilian divers express astonishment that they had not been briefed concerning passengers' bodies, whereas they had been briefed concerning the black box and electronic equipment locations.
- The contention of the Soviet divers, as well as Admiral Sidorov, that there were no bodies found could not have been contrived to support the initial Soviet position that KAL 007 was a spy plane without civilians, as General Ogarkov had years previous – on September 9, 1983 – conceded that KAL 007 was a passenger plane carrying civilian passengers which the United States had cynically used for espionage purposes. All evidence, therefore, suggests the sincerity of the Russian divers' claims that there were no bodies aboard or in association with the sunken airliner.

* * *

"Thus, our search efforts were in actuality little more than a charade being played out while the Soviets engaged in their own ruse of pretending themselves to "search" for a wreck they had probably already immediately located, stripped [abducting all passengers and crew. B.S], probably sunk, and probably destroyed under water." (CIA Report/Republican Staff Study, pg. 65.)

NOTE, from page 137-138 of *Rescue 007: The Untold Story of KAL 007 and Its Survivors* :

For a fascinating corroboration of the Soviet harassment on this particular vessel [*Keiko-Maruru No. 3*] as well as corroborating Commander Piotti's assertion that the Soviets employed false

¹⁰⁷ See earlier. The disparity between the few and tiny fragments actually handed over by the Soviets and reported by the Soviet divers, and a basically intact aircraft that would be entered as reported by some divers and military sources to Ivestia, is truly striking.

pingers to divert and confuse the allied endeavors, we may turn to a Soviet seaman's report published in the *Izvestiya* series and quoted in "World Wide Issues," 31 May 1991:

"I recall: there was a moment when Japanese search vessel *Keiko-Maru No. 3* (or *Kaiko-Maru No. 3*) dropped anchor next to *Mirchink*; this vessel had a self-propelled underwater search apparatus, controlled from the vessel via cable. The operational radius of the apparatus from the mother vessel is, if I am not mistaken, two to 2.5 kilometers... At that time the TOF commander, Admiral Sidorov, gave an order—immediately equip a trawler stationed on Sakhalin with grapnels (devices to cut mine mooring cables or hawsers) and send it to a station next to the *Keiko-Maru*. As soon as the vessel lowered its apparatus, the trawler was supposed to cut the control cable of the Japanese... See how far it went: this was outright banditry! The only thing that saved the *Keiko-Maru* was the false "pinger" planted by our Navy. The Japanese also took the bait of its beacon signal and went to the wrong area."

And so the Soviets not only safely absconded with KAL 007's surviving passengers, they also successfully kept U.S.-led forces at bay, preventing them from seeing and understanding that the "wreck" that their lead salvage vessel, the *Mikhail Mirchink*, was bringing up — was nothing but a ruse.

Bert Schlossberg