**KAL 007 Shootdown**. 1 October 83. We had a crew flying that night. They had worked the standard 2300 for 0100 preflight/launch that was customary for the beginning of each quarter. I was a young AT2 running the AT shop in Atsugi in between detachments with my crew. By early morning, the news was reporting the KAL 747 as missing by early morning. Our crew was still on station. When they recovered in Atsugi at approximately 1000, news stations were reporting the Safe on Sakhalin Island scenario. The crew was de-briefed on the aircraft for more than an hour. When I met one of the crewmembers walking off the aircraft and told him what the news was reporting, he simply replied with a grim face, “they’re not on Sakhalin.” No PARPRO aircraft flew for 5 days. When we did return to the sky, we were flying “SAR” missions. So, we took our flights into 12 miles. It was a bit unnerving to look at the Russian coast from such a short distance.

Bill Beard AVCM USN (Ret)

**Excerpt from Wikipedia**

In 1983, [Cold War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War) tensions between the United States and Soviet Union had escalated to a level not seen since the [Cuban Missile Crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Missile_Crisis) because of several factors. These included the United States' [Strategic Defense Initiative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_Defense_Initiative), its planned deployment of the [Pershing II Weapon System](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pershing_II_Weapon_System) in Europe in March and April, and FleetEx '83, the largest fleet exercise held to date in the North Pacific.[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Johnson-55-29) The military hierarchy of the Soviet Union (particularly the old guard led by [Soviet General Secretary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Secretary_of_the_Communist_Party_of_the_Soviet_Union) [Yuri Andropov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuri_Andropov) and [Minister of Defence](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minister_of_Defence_%28Soviet_Union%29) [Dmitriy Ustinov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dmitriy_Ustinov)) viewed these actions as bellicose and destabilizing; they were deeply suspicious of [U.S. President](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._President) [Ronald Reagan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ronald_Reagan)'s intentions and openly fearful he was planning a [pre-emptive nuclear strike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-emptive_nuclear_strike) against the Soviet Union. These fears culminated in [RYAN](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RYAN), the code name for a secret intelligence-gathering program initiated by Andropov to detect a potential nuclear sneak attack which he believed Reagan was plotting.[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Richelson-385-30)

Aircraft from [USS *Midway*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Midway_%28CV-41%29) and [USS *Enterprise*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Enterprise_%28CVN-65%29) repeatedly overflew Soviet military installations in the [disputed Kuril Islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuril_Islands_dispute) during FleetEx '83,[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Pry20-31) resulting in the dismissal or reprimanding of Soviet military officials who had been unable to shoot them down.[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Fischer-32) On the Soviet side, RYAN was expanded.[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Fischer-32) Lastly, there was a heightened [alert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alert_state) around the [Kamchatka Peninsula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamchatka_Peninsula) at the time KAL 007 was in the vicinity, because of a Soviet missile test that was scheduled for the same day. A United States Air Force [Boeing RC-135](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boeing_RC-135) reconnaissance aircraft flying in the area was monitoring the missile test off the peninsula.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Schultz367-33)

At 15:51 UTC, according to Soviet sources,[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Pearson-25) KAL 007 entered the [restricted airspace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restricted_airspace) of the Kamchatka Peninsula. The buffer zone extended 200 kilometres (120 mi) from Kamchatka's coast and is known as a [flight information region](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight_information_region) (FIR). The 100-kilometre (62 mi) radius of the buffer zone nearest to Soviet territory had the additional designation of [prohibited airspace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prohibited_airspace). When KAL 007 was about 130 kilometres (81 mi) from the Kamchatka coast, four [MiG-23](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikoyan-Gurevich_MiG-23) fighters were scrambled to intercept the Boeing 747.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-NASA-10)

Significant command and control problems were experienced trying to vector the fast military jets onto the Boeing before they ran out of fuel. In addition, pursuit was made more difficult, according to Soviet Air Force Captain [Aleksandr Zuyev](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aleksandr_Zuyev_%28pilot%29), who [defected](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defection) to the West in 1989, because Arctic [gales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gale) had knocked out Soviet radar ten days before.[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-34) The unidentified jetliner therefore crossed over the Kamchatka Peninsula back into international airspace over the [Sea of Okhotsk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Okhotsk) without being intercepted.

The Commander of the Soviet Far East District Air Defense Forces, General Valery Kamensky,[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-35) was adamant that KAL 007 was to be destroyed even over neutral waters but only after positive identification showed it not to be a passenger plane. His subordinate, General [Anatoly Kornukov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatoly_Kornukov), commander of Sokol Air Base and later to become commander of the Russian Air Force, insisted that there was no need to make positive identification as "the intruder" had already flown over the Kamchatka Peninsula.

**General Kornukov** (to Military District Headquarters-Gen. Kamensky): (5:47) *"...simply destroy [it] even if it is over neutral waters? Are the orders to destroy it over neutral waters? Oh, well."*
**Kamensky**: *We must find out, maybe it is some civilian craft or God knows who."*

**Kornukov**: *"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."*

Units of the [Soviet Air Defence Forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Air_Defence_Forces) that had been tracking the South Korean aircraft for more than an hour while it entered and left Soviet airspace now classified the aircraft as a military target when it reentered their airspace over Sakhalin.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-NASA-10) After the protracted [ground-controlled interception](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ground-controlled_interception), the three Su-15 fighters (from nearby [Dolinsk-Sokol](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolinsk-Sokol) airbase) and the MiG-23[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-36) (from [Smirnykh Air Base](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smirnykh_%28air_base%29)) managed to make visual contact with the Boeing. The pilot of the lead Su-15 fighter fired [warning shots](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warning_shot), but recalled later in 1991, "I fired four bursts, more than 200 rounds. For all the good it did. After all, I was loaded with armor piercing shells, not incendiary shells. It's doubtful whether anyone could see them."[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Illesh-Eng-37)

At this point, KAL 007 contacted [Tokyo Area Control Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokyo_Area_Control_Center), requesting clearance to ascend to a higher [flight level](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight_level) for reasons of fuel economy; the request was granted, so the Boeing started to climb, gradually slowing as it exchanged speed for altitude. The decrease in speed caused the pursuing fighter to overshoot the Boeing, an action that was interpreted by the Soviet pilot as an evasive maneuver. The order to shoot KAL 007 down was given as it was about to leave Soviet airspace for the second time. At around 18:26 UTC, under pressure from General Kornukov, and ground controllers who were not to let the aircraft escape into international airspace, the lead fighter was able to move back into a position where it could fire two [K-8](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K-8_%28missile%29) ([NATO reporting name](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_reporting_name): AA-3 "Anab") [air-to-air missiles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Air-to-air_missile) at the plane.[[36]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Maier-38)

#### Soviet pilot's recollection of shootdown

In a 1991 interview with [*Izvestia*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Izvestia), Major Genadi Osipovich, pilot of the Su-15 interceptor that shot the 747 down, spoke about his recollections of the events leading up to the shootdown. Contrary to official Soviet statements at the time, he recalled telling ground controllers that there were "blinking lights".[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-nytimes-Osipovich-39) He continued, saying that "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."[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-nytimes-Osipovich-39) He furthermore did not provide a detailed description of the aircraft to his ground controllers: "I did not tell the ground that it was a Boeing-type plane; they did not ask me."[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Illesh-Eng-37)[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-nytimes-Osipovich-39)[[note 3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-40)



[K-8 missile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K-8_%28missile%29) (the type fired at KAL 007) mounted on the wing of a [Sukhoi Su-15](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukhoi_Su-15)

Commenting on the moment that KAL 007 slowed as it ascended from [flight level](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight_level) 330 to flight level 350, and then on his maneuvering for missile launch, Osipovich said:

They [KAL 007] quickly lowered their speed. They were flying at 400 km/h (249 mph). My speed was more than 400. I was simply unable to fly slower. In my opinion, the intruder's intentions were plain. If I did not want to go into a stall, I would be forced to overshoot them. That's exactly what happened. We had already flown over the island [Sakhalin]. It is narrow at that point, the target was about to get away... Then the ground [controller] gave the command: "Destroy the target...!" That was easy to say. 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.[[38]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-41)

We shot down the plane legally... Later we began to lie about small details: the plane was supposedly flying without running lights or strobe light, that tracer bullets were fired, or that I had radio contact with them on the emergency frequency of 121.5 megahertz.[[39]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Daniloff-42)

#### Soviet command hierarchy of shootdown



Anatoly Kornukov receiving an award from Vladimir Putin in the [Grand Kremlin Palace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Kremlin_Palace), Moscow (2000)

The Soviet real-time military communication transcripts of the shootdown suggest the chain of command from the top general to Major Osipovich, the Su-15 interceptor pilot who shot down KAL 007.[[40]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-43)[[41]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-44) In reverse order, they are:

* Major Gennady Osipovich,
* Captain Titovnin, Combat Control Center – Fighter Division
* Lt. Colonel Maistrenko, Smirnykh Air Base Fighter Division Acting Chief of Staff, who confirmed the shootdown order to Titovnin

"Titovnin: You confirm the task?

"Maistrenko: Yes."

* Lt. Colonel Gerasimenko, Acting Commander, 41st Fighter Regiment.

"Gerasimenko: (to Kornukov) Task received. Destroy target 60–65 with missile fire. Accept control of fighter from Smirnikh."

* General Anatoly Kornukov, Commander of Sokol Air Base – Sakhalin.

"Kornukov: (to Gerasimenko) I repeat the task, Fire the missiles, Fire on target 60–65. Destroy target 60–65... Take control of the MiG 23 from Smirnikh, call sign 163, call sign 163 He is behind the target at the moment. Destroy the target!... Carry out the task, Destroy it!"

* General Valery Kamensky, Commander of Far East Military District Air Defense Forces.

"Kornukov: (To Kamensky) ...simply destroy [it] even if it is over neutral waters? Are the orders to destroy it over neutral waters? Oh, well."

* Army General Ivan Moiseevich Tretyak, Commander of the Far East Military District.

"Weapons were used, weapons authorized at the highest level. Ivan Moiseevich authorized it. Hello, hello.", "Say again.", "I cannot hear you clearly now.", "He gave the order. Hello, hello, hello.", "Yes, yes.", "Ivan Moiseevich gave the order, Tretyak.", "Roger, roger.", "Weapons were used at his order."[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-45)

#### Post-attack flight



[ICAO](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Civil_Aviation_Organization) chart of KAL 007's flight for the 144 seconds after missile attack

At the time of the attack, the plane had been cruising at an altitude of about 35,000 feet (11,000 m). Tapes recovered from the airliner's [cockpit voice recorder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockpit_voice_recorder) indicate that the crews were unaware that they were off course and violating Soviet airspace. Immediately after missile detonation, the airliner began a 113-second arc upward because of a damaged crossover cable between the left inboard and right outboard elevators.[[43]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-ICAO93-55-46)

At 18:26:46 UTC,[[44]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-ICAO93-54-47) at the apex of the arc at altitude 38,250 feet (11,660 m),[[43]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-ICAO93-55-46) either the pilot was able to turn off the autopilot or the autopilot tripped and the plane began to descend to 35,000 feet (11,000 m). From 18:27:01 until 18:27:09, the flight crew reports to Tokyo Radio informing that KAL 007 to "descend to 10,000" [feet]. At 18:27:20, ICAO graphing of Digital Flight Data Recorder tapes show that after a descent phase and a 10 second "nose-up", KAL 007 is now leveled out at pre-missile detonation altitude of 35,000 ft (11,000 m), forward acceleration is now back to pre-missile detonation rate of zero acceleration, and air speed has returned to pre-detonation velocity.

Yaw (oscillations), begun at the time of missile detonation, continue decreasingly until the end of the minute 44 second portion of the tape. The Boeing did not break up, explode or plummet immediately after the attack; it continued its gradual descent for four minutes, then leveled off at 16,424 feet (18:30–18:31 UTC), rather than continue descending to 10,000 as previously reported to Tokyo Radio, continuing at this altitude for almost five more minutes (18:35 UTC).

The last [cockpit voice recorder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cockpit_voice_recorder) entry occurred at 18:27:46 while in this phase of the descent. At 18:28 UTC, the aircraft was reported turning to the north.[[45]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-ICAO93-132-48) ICAO analysis concluded that the flight crew "retained limited control" of the aircraft.[[46]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-49) Finally, the aircraft began to descend in spirals over [Moneron Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moneron_Island) before coming down 2.6 miles (4.2 km), killing all 269 on board.[[note 4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-50) The aircraft was last seen visually by Osipovich, "somehow descending slowly" over Moneron Island. The aircraft disappeared off long range military radar at [Wakkanai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wakkanai%2C_Hokkaid%C5%8D), Japan at a height of 1,000 feet (300 m).[[47]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-51)

KAL 007 was probably attacked in international airspace, with a 1993 Russian report listing the location of the missile firing outside its territory at [46°46′27″N 141°32′48″E](https://tools.wmflabs.org/geohack/geohack.php?pagename=Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007&params=46_46_27_N_141_32_48_E_type:event&title=KAL007),[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-Fischer-32)[[48]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-52) although the intercepting pilot stated otherwise in a subsequent interview. Initial reports that the airliner had been forced to land on Sakhalin were soon proved false. One of these reports conveyed via phone by Orville Brockman, the Washington office spokesman of the [Federal Aviation Administration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Aviation_Administration) to the press secretary of Larry McDonald was that the FAA in Tokyo had been informed by the Japanese Civil Aviation Bureau that "Japanese self-defense force radar confirms that the Hokkaido radar followed Air Korea to a landing in Soviet territory on the island of Sakhalinska and it is confirmed by the manifest that Congressman McDonald is on board".[[49]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-53)

A Japanese fisherman aboard the *58th Chidori Maru* later reported to the [Japanese Maritime Safety Agency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan_Coast_Guard) (this report was cited by ICAO analysis) that he had heard a plane at low altitude, but had not seen it. Then he heard "a loud sound followed by a bright flash of light on the horizon, then another dull sound and a less intense flash of light on the horizon"[[50]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-54) and smelled aviation fuel.[[51]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korean_Air_Lines_Flight_007#cite_note-55)