

The KAL shutdown and the rise of the Far East Command

by Clifford Gaddy and Rachel Douglas

Korean Air Lines Flight 007 was shot down on the night of Sept. 1, 1983, by a Soviet fighter plane of the **Troops of National Air Defense** (Voiska PVO). In the year that followed, the main officers in the chain of command that cleared that shooting have advanced in prominence within the military-dominated clique that runs the Soviet Union today. In Moscow, the butchers of KAL Flight 007 are in charge.

The national commander of the PVO is **Marshal of Aviation A. I. Koldunov**. On Soviet Air Defense Day, April 8, 1984, Koldunov took to the pages of *Pravda* for his first public comment on KAL 007. "The termination of the provocation by American special services using a South Korean aircraft on September 1, 1983," he wrote, exemplified "the high level of readiness to perform their military duty," on the part of PVO personnel.

At the time KAL 007 was shot, the national PVO Chief of Staff was the late **Col.-Gen. Semyon Romanov**. The first high-ranking Soviet officer to issue a public justification of the downing, in a *Pravda* article shortly after it happened, Romanov likewise boasted in April 1984, that PVO planes are in "a state of permanent combat readiness" to "annihilate" aircraft that come "anywhere near their range." Romanov is the only KAL 007-linked commander to have disappeared from the scene; he died in May, "suddenly, while performing official duties," after being reassigned early that month as Warsaw Pact representative to the East German army.

The chain of command in the shooting of KAL 007, however, ran not only to the national PVO leadership. The statement by Soviet Armed Forces Chief of Staff **Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov**, that the decision was taken by the "district Air Defense commander," points up a reorganization of the PVO that occurred in 1980. PVO forces were integrated with the air defense forces of the 16 Military Districts into which the Soviet Ground Forces are divided. For Sakhalin Island, where KAL 007 was downed, the relevant regional commands are the **Far East Military District** and the important super-district, the **Far East Theater Command**.

The commanders there in September 1983, the superiors of the "district Air Defense commander" who cleared the Su-15 interceptor pilot to fire on KAL 007, were **Army Gen. Ivan M. Tretyak**, commander of the Far East Military District, and **Army Gen. Vladimir L. Govorov**, commander of Far East Theater Troops. Both of them received promotions

in the summer of 1984, Govorov becoming **Deputy Minister of Defense**, and Tretyak taking his place as commander of the Far East Theater Troops. These changes, inferred from references to these officers on the pages of the military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (*Red Star*), mark them as rising stars in the Soviet military leadership and underscore the importance of the Far East in Soviet military thinking.

Chita: a second command center

The Far East Theater Command is often called **High Command-Far East**, which denotes its special role in Soviet planning for nuclear war. Headquartered in the southeast Siberian city of **Chita**, it subsumes the **Far East Military District**, the **Transbaikal Military District**, the **Siberian Military District**, Soviet forces in the **Peoples Republic of Mongolia**, and elements of the **Pacific Fleet**, headquartered in Vladivostok. The three military districts under the High Command-Far East comprise a total of 38 motor-rifle divisions, 6 tank divisions and 3 artillery regiments.

The Chita headquarters was established in June 1945 for the Manchurian campaign against Japan, when **Marshal A. M. Vasilevskii** was commanding forces on several fronts in the Far East. It was sharply upgraded in approximately 1979, in line with an across-the-board reorganization of the Soviet Armed Forces (including the above-mentioned integration of the PVO), emphasizing formations that could undergo the transition to actual nuclear war-fighting in the shortest possible amount of time. Marshal Ogarkov, who has directed much of this transformation, stressed in an article on May 9, 1983, "the necessity of having in peacetime, organs of command and control which could immediately go into action at the outbreak of war without a lengthy period of reorganization."

The assignment of senior personnel to Chita and the pattern of Soviet industrial planning for eastern Siberia and the Soviet Far East indicate that Chita has been built up so that it could function independently in the case of nuclear war. For as long as possible, it would take orders directly from the Supreme Command in Moscow, but if communications were broken, it would function alone. The idea is that Siberia becomes a survival area in a nuclear holocaust, and Chita the survival center.

Coinciding with the promotions of Tretyak and Govorov,

the Soviet leadership and official press increased their attention to the second Transsiberian Railroad, the Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM), which cuts across the three military districts, running north of Lake Baikal out to the Pacific Ocean. There have been reports of tunnel-collapses and other impediments to completion of the BAM on an accelerated schedule as mandated by the Soviet leadership, but equally persistent is the push by the military to get it finished as soon as possible, as a militarily vital project. The BAM is a backup to the existing Transsiberian, which is closer to the Chinese frontier; it is also supposed to be the lifeline of a so-called Territorial Production Complex, the industrial base of a Siberian survival zone.

Krasnaya Zvezda has reported pledges by military engineers to speed up BAM construction. When it was announced on April 1 that BAM workers had vowed to open up the entire line for trains one year ahead of schedule, *Krasnaya Zvezda* reported that "the military engineer troops have adopted their own counter-plan—to finish laying the main route by the October Revolution Anniversary" (November 1984).

In early June, a special government commission on the BAM, chaired by former KGB official, now First Deputy Prime Minister **Geidar Aliyev**, toured the railroad to inspect and criticize the pace of construction. The week-long trip took Aliyev along the whole BAM route, to adjacent river ports, to Vladivostok, to units of the Pacific Fleet, and to a power plant, a shipyard, an airplane factory, and so on. He was accompanied on segments of his tour by **Tretyak** and by the First Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet, **Vice Admiral N. Ya. Yasakov**.

The Far East commanders

Tretyak and Govorov are among a group of officers who rose to the pinnacle of the Soviet High Command beginning in the mid-1970s, replacing the deceased or retired generals and marshals who were leaders during World War II. Born in the early 1920s, these officers are old enough to have seen combat during World War II, but not past their prime today. Many of them, including Tretyak, Govorov, Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces **Marshal Vasilii I. Petrov**,



The Far East Theater Command of the Soviet Armed Forces, headquartered in Chita, comprises the Siberian, Transbaikalian, and Far East Military Districts, Soviet forces in Mongolia, and elements of the Pacific Fleet. Target symbol marks spot over Sakhalin Island where KAL Flight 007 was shot down.

and Army Gen. **Dmitrii T. Yazov**, who has replaced Tretyak as commander of the Far East Military District, have spent significant time in the Far East.

Army Gen. Vladimir L. Govorov

Born in 1924. Son of the World War II commander, Marshal Leonid A. Govorov. Finished the war as a captain. Graduated from Frunze Military Academy in 1949, a classmate of **I. M. Tretyak** and **M. I. Sorokin**, today the Commander-in-Chief of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Graduated from the General Staff Academy in 1963. Member of the Communist Party Central Committee since 1981.

1964-69: Commander of 11th Guards Army, Kaliningrad

1969-71: First Deputy Commander of Group of Soviet Forces in Germany

1971-72: Commander of Baltic Military District

1972-80: Commander of Moscow Military District and Chief of the Moscow garrison

1977: Promoted to Army General

Dec. 1980-June 1984: Commander-in-Chief of Far East Theater Command

Since June 1984: Deputy Minister of Defense of the U.S.S.R., probably Chief Inspector, replacing the aged Marshal K. S. Moskalenko.

Army Gen. Ivan Moiseyevich Tretyak

Born in 1923. Commanded a Guards motor rifle regiment during World War II and was decorated as Hero of the Soviet Union (most other officers of his generation received their "Hero of the Soviet Union" awards only in the 1970s, when they were already senior commanders). Graduated from Frunze Military Academy in 1949. Graduated from the General Staff Academy in 1959 (in the same class as Chief of Staff **Ogarkov** and Warsaw Pact Commander-in-Chief **Marshal Viktor Kulikov**). Member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) since 1976.

1967-76: Commander of Byelorussian Military District

1977: Promoted to Army General

1976-84: Commander of the Far East Military District

Since July 1984: Commander-in-Chief of Far East Theater Command.

Before his promotion in the Far East command this summer, *Krasnaya Zvezda* singled Tretyak out as an exemplary commander who was on the rise. On Feb. 28, 1984, the military daily carried a long "human interest" feature designed to portray Tretyak as more than just a military leader, a political activist who, as deputy to the Supreme Soviet (Soviet parliament), intervenes to better the personal lives of his constituents. *Krasnaya Zvezda* quoted a woman school principal from Kamchatka peninsula, endorsing Tretyak at an election meeting with the words: "Our main call to you is to strengthen the defense of the Fatherland and the might of our Armed Forces, which are the bulwark of peace." Tretyak received further recognition in late May, at the big national congress of Komsomol (Communist Youth League) secre-

taries in the armed forces, where he was the main speaker besides party chief **Konstantin Chernenko** and the senior Moscow-based commanders. In his speech, Tretyak marked himself as a close adherent to the cause of defending Russia's "Holy Soil":

"Every Far East troop knows that by the fault of American imperialism [the current international situation] is continuing to grow worse in the Far East as well. Deeply aware of their great responsibility for the security of the eastern boundaries of our Motherland, the entire personnel of the district are performing their military service and are persistently carrying out the tasks set for them by the Communist Party. . . . Permit me to pledge to the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Soviet Government that the Far East troops are always ready to carry out the order of the Motherland and to deliver a crushing rebuff to any aggressor, should he be so bold as to encroach upon our holy soil."

Army Gen. Dmitrii Timofeyevich Yazov

Born in 1923. Candidate Member of the Central Committee of the CPSU since 1981.

1976-78: First Deputy Commander of Far East Military District (under **Tretyak**)

1979-80: Commander of Central Group of Forces (Soviet forces in Czechoslovakia)

1980-84: Commander of Central Asian Military District

Feb. 1984: Promoted to Army General.

Like Tretyak, Yazov was built up in the Soviet press before his Far East transfer. On June 12, *Krasnaya Zvezda* published his article, "Working with the Komsomol." On June 20, his Chief of Staff in the Central Asian Military District, **Lt.-Gen. A. Kovtunov**, wrote for *Krasnaya Zvezda* on "Command and Control in Battle: Under Conditions of Interference," treating one of the main problems stressed by **Marshal Ustinov** and other commanders—the ability to maintain command and control of troops in a situation when the enemy uses massive countermeasures. Kovtunov discussed combat under conditions of nuclear strikes and electronic disruption of communications.

Army Gen. Grigorii Ivanovich Salmanov

Born in 1922. Graduated from Frunze Military Academy in 1949. Graduated from the General Staff Academy in 1964. Member of the Central Committee of the CPSU since 1981.

1969-75: Commander of Kiev Military District

1975-78: Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Ground Forces, in charge of combat training

Since 1978: Commander of Transbaikal Military District.

In November 1977, Salmanov was chosen to conclude and sum up a months-long discussion in the Soviet military journal *Voyenni Vestnik* on the "high-speed offensive," the upgrading of Soviet operational capability for doing battle with highly mobile, relatively independent units under nuclear war-fighting conditions.