

The blood and soil of Mother Russia

by Rachel Douglas

The Feeling of the Motherland (Chuvstvo Rodiny)—the title of Leonid Brezhnev's last volume of memoirs—is the watchword for the blood-and-soil brand of "patriotism" whipped up by the military and popular media for the Soviet population. Nowhere does it find more grotesque expression than in post-KAL mood pieces on the passion of a Russian fighter pilot taking aim at an intruder in the airspace of the Motherland.

The Sept. 7, 1983 issue of the weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta* carried an article on Soviet air defense forces by A. Prokhanov, a journalist of explicitly Gnostic bent, who writes on military themes in terms of a great battle between the Forces of Darkness and the Forces of Light, the latter being identified with the female goddess, Mother Russia. Prokhanov, who in the past called an intercontinental ballistic missile "alive" and "a symbol of supreme spiritual flight, as Ivan the Great's church steeple was for our (15th century) ancestors," described his visit to a ground command station in the far north of the U.S.S.R.:

"I sit at the command point. *I feel* . . . the global military confrontation gripping the whole earth today. . . . *I feel* the NATO . . . bombers, taking aim at our cities and villages . . . aircraft carriers, ready to move to our waters and attack those targets in the North Russian plain, upon the naming of which your terrified and tormented heart gets ready to put itself under attack, to shield these sacred things."

The heroic air defense pilot, according to Prokhanov, thinks something like this:

"In front of you is the enemy . . . behind you is the fatherland and its cities. And you are the only one who has the power to save them. This truth is present in the blue eyes of the major. . . . He feels his machine, his terrible-beautiful fighter, like a living being. Her smooth, heavy flight. Her ability to turn and glide. Her 'corporeal' and 'spiritual' qualities. . . . Seizing the target in his radar sight, he speaks to her, as to a living being: friend. Come on, don't let me down, my dear.' And the 'dear' lets out the missile in front, and turns the target into a flying explosion."

The theme is constantly present in the Soviet military press, in scarcely less purple prose. The editorial in *Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star)* on July 21, 1984, for example, glorified the action of one Capt. G. Yeliseyev, in an unidentified incident:

"The melody of the U.S.S.R.'s national anthem solemnly sounds. The flag of our Motherland slowly ascends the flagpole. The ranks of troops stand stock still. In the silence that has fallen, the measured words of the order on assuming combat duty ring out. So goes the ritual of going on combat duty, in many units of the Soviet Armed Forces. Those are unforgettable, stirring minutes. It is as if the Motherland herself is admonishing the soldier, calling on him to be vigilant, responsible, and ready for great deeds.

"Combat pilot Captain G. Yeliseyev exhibited precisely those qualities during the execution of a combat task. An intruder plane penetrated the airspace of our country. It was immediately located by radar stations. Captain Yeliseyev was ordered to intercept the target. The pilot flew his fighter into the indicated sector. The situation in the air was difficult. The intruder could have escaped unpunished. Then Yeliseyev, forcing his engine, approached the target at maximum speed and downed it by ramming. The Soviet pilot terminated the hostile provocation at the cost of his life. By an order of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., Captain Yeliseyev was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

"What led Captain Yeliseyev to do this great deed? Above all the feeling of a soldier's duty, ideological conviction, the passionate heart of a communist, and the highest responsibility for the matter entrusted to him, for the security of the Motherland.

"The Motherland. . . . Great are her expanses. . . . And whatever corner you take, from the Kush to the Arctic, from Brest to the Kuriles, there is great creative work under way. . . . The heirs of the combat traditions of the front, the soldiers of the 1980s, see it as their sacred duty to ever more persistently master modern combat technology and weaponry, to raise their vigilance, to strengthen their discipline and degree of organization, to reliably ensure the security of our Motherland."

On September 10, 1983, speaking in the Crimean city of Sevastopol, Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Dmitrii Ustinov defended the downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007:

"The imperialist circles did not even stop at such a monstrous provocation as the incursion into our country's airspace of a South Korean aircraft, clearly for reconnaissance purposes, disregarding the possible human casualties. . . . It is the sovereign right of every state to defend its borders, including airspace. . . . We firmly state that the Soviet Union's borders are sacred and inviolable. We are always ready to stand up for ourselves. Every provocation will receive a due rebuff!"