

Editorial

Was it sabotage?

The Schiller Institute has issued a call for investigation of the air tragedy that occurred at the Ramstein air show on Aug. 27. To dismiss the crash as an example of pilot error no doubt appears to be politically expedient, to those who would maintain the fiction of *détente* with the Soviet Union.

By burying the question of whether this was an example of Soviet, or Soviet-sponsored terrorism they hope to pretend that we are "at peace." Unfortunately history has provided numerous examples of the dangers of appeasement. The road to war is paved with precisely such delusions.

The maneuver that ended in the three-airplane collision was one which had been done by the Italian *Frecce Tricolori* (Tricolor Arrows) team thousands of times in the past, successfully. It was a maneuver which depended primarily on the pilots' judgment, rather than computer direction.

Grounds for suspicion exist because of the unprecedented number of military accidents which have occurred during this year to F-15 and F-16 airplanes, flying in Europe (particularly over Germany). With military flights, there are always some "unavoidable" accidents, which take place as a result of pilots deliberately driving their planes to the limits of maneuverability in order to simulate battle conditions; however, the number of such accidents occurring this year is statistically improbable.

In the third week of September, the same unexplained trend toward military air disasters seems to have hit U.S. shores. On Sept. 12, two U.S. F-14s crashed, one in California and the other off the coast of North Carolina. The California incident occurred at the Miramar Naval Air Station in San Diego, where, apparently as a result of mechanical difficulties, the plane crashed into a hangar at a suburban airfield where it was trying to land.

The other Navy tomcat was involved in routine maneuvers in a simulated dogfight with another F-14 and an A-4 attack jet, and it exploded into a fireball when it was about 22 miles off the North Carolina Coast. The plane was stationed at Virginia Beach's Oceana naval air station, where, coincidentally, there

was a big air show scheduled for the next weekend. The Soviets are known to routinely monitor Navy maneuvers off the North Carolina coast.

These accidents were followed by crashes of two F-16s on the following day. These occurred as two separate incidents—in one, a jet on a training mission near Sumter, South Carolina struck a house and exploded. The second jet crashed in Utah.

There is no reason, on the face of it, to suppose that any of these four crashes is sabotage, but for the exceptional pattern of air disasters; nonetheless, the overall picture is such that the question must be raised—and not only about the Ramstein air show.

In striking contrast to this sorry Western picture, just one week after the Ramstein show, there was a spectacular show of prowess by the Soviets, who executed a unique maneuver at an air show held in Farnborough, England. Flying a Mikoyan MiG-29, which is a plane judged to be comparable to the West's F-16, F-18, or Mirage 2000, they did a climb under full acceleration and peak power, which was coupled with a 250-300 foot tail slide at 3,000 feet. Perhaps the most exceptional feature of this demonstration of maneuverability, was that the pilots apparently guided the plane without in-flight computer control.

If the Soviets have been sabotaging Western planes by some use of radio frequency devices to trigger instrument failure, by themselves bypassing fly-by-wire electronics, they are largely out of reach of any NATO retaliation that would rely on similar measures. Of course, the possibilities for sabotage are not limited to sophisticated use of radio frequency waves; a simple radio device can effectively trigger a bomb with devastating results.

If the Soviets are indeed downing our planes with impunity, then we must rally the citizens of the West to the implications of fighting this undeclared war. Anything less than full, public disclosure of what is really going on, is treason.

If it should turn out that this spate of air disasters is not the result of sabotage, we should know this too, since then we are, in fact, sabotaging ourselves, and this is also intolerable.