Some years ago as I became increasingly aware of the severe dishonesty of our mainstream media on all sorts of controversial topics, I began telling a joke to a few of my friends.

Suppose, I would say, that I happened to be out walking one pleasant afternoon in Palo Alto, and suddenly heard a gigantic explosion in the general direction of Mountain View, soon followed by a huge pillar of smoke rising towards the sky. Being busy with my own work, I might have no time to bother investigating, and merely wondered what surprising story the front pages of my morning newspapers would reveal as the cause behind those dramatic events. But when I eagerly opened those papers the following day, mention of the explosion was nowhere to be found, either on Page One or anywhere else, even in my own local San Jose Mercury News. So unless I somehow persuaded myself that I had simply imagined the whole thing, I would henceforth stop believing anything I read—or failed to read—in my once-trusted news outlets.

I thought my allegorical fable rather amusing, and repeated it on a number of occasions. But quite recently I came across a rough counterpart in real life, a remarkable tale that had almost completely escaped my attention for over twenty years.

When I used to recall the leading events of 1996, what came to mind was Bill Clinton’s triumphant reelection campaign in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing and political overreach by Newt Gingrich’s Congressional Republicans. Perhaps there had also been some sort of plane crash on the East Coast, though none of the details were sharp or memorable in
my mind. But in fact, the sudden mid-air explosion of TWA Flight 800 on a New York to Paris route was actually voted the top national news story of that year[1], ranking above the presidential campaign, while the 230 fatalities made it by far New York’s worst disaster of the twentieth century, and the second worst airline tragedy in American history to that date. Indeed, some journalists at the time suggested that the resulting media coverage had eclipsed that of any other transportation calamity since the sinking of the Titanic almost a century earlier.

I had almost forgotten the story of that doomed airliner when I opened my morning edition of the New York Times in mid-July 2013 and read a short review[2] in the Arts Section, favorably discussing a new television documentary presenting the “conspiracy theory” that the plane had been destroyed by a missile rather than by an accidental fuel tank explosion as the government investigation had firmly concluded at the time, a verdict strongly affirmed by both the news and editorial pages of the Times. I had recently published “Our American Pravda”[3] and an eminent mainstream academic who appreciated my piece soon dropped me a note pointing to a website discussion[4] of the details of the plane crash, about which I knew nothing. Being preoccupied with other matters, I could only glance at the material, which shocked me, but now that I’ve gone back and spent some time on the topic, the story turns out to be a truly remarkable one.

The outline of facts is hardly complicated. Soon after taking off from New York’s JFK Airport on July 17, 1996, TWA Flight 800 suddenly exploded in the air just off Long Island. So enormous a loss of life naturally produced an immediate scrambling of numerous federal agencies to investigate the cause, and with widespread fears of terrorism, the FBI launched the largest, most complex investigation in its entire history, deploying some 500 field agents to the area. The investigators soon gathered a copious quantity of seemingly consistent evidence.

Large numbers of local witnesses were immediately interviewed by the swarm of federal agents, with 278 of them reporting that they saw a streak of light, much like a missile, shoot up into the sky in the direction of the aircraft just before the huge explosion. Employees at the local FAA radar installation immediately reported to the government that they had seen what appeared to be a missile closing with the airliner just before it exploded, and other installations produced similar radar records. When tests were eventually performed on the plane wreckage, traces of explosive chemicals were found, exactly the sort used in the warhead of a missile, as well as some reddish-orange chemical residue that a laboratory later identified as likely missile exhaust propellant. An enormous effort was made to locate every possible piece of the wreckage, and for many of these, the contours of the damage indicated an initial explosion external to the plane. Almost immediately after the disaster, a bidding-war allegedly broke out between the national television networks for an amateur home-video showing a missile striking and destroying TWA 800, with the tape eventually being sold for more than $50,000 and briefly broadcast on the MSNBC cable news channel before reportedly being seized as evidence by FBI agents. In addition, a local resident provided a still photo taken at the time showing what seemed to be a missile rising toward the aircraft.

Based on all this initial evidence, many of the early news stories reported that the plane had probably been destroyed by a missile, with widespread speculation about whether the calamity was due to terrorist action or instead accidental “friendly fire” from one of the U.S. naval
warships operating in the vicinity. Given the extreme sensitivity of the topic, government officials urged the media to keep an open mind until the full investigation was completed. However, the public debate sometimes turned rancorous, with some individuals soon alleging that a government cover-up was in the works. Eventually, the CIA was brought into the investigation, given its tremendous expertise in certain matters.

After more than a year of detailed research, the government investigation finally concluded that no missile could possibly have been involved, with all the eyewitnesses having been misled by what amounted to an optical illusion caused by the explosion of the aircraft. That explosion itself had been entirely spontaneous, probably caused by a random spark igniting one of the gas tanks. Given the controversy in the case, the CIA helpfully produced a computer animation showing the official reconstruction of the events, which was endlessly broadcast by our news media to explain the disaster to the public. The simulation showed the jetliner spontaneously exploding in mid-air, with no external cause, and just to further clarify matters, the CIA animators also inserted an explanatory message in large text: “There Was No Missile.” The New York Times, and nearly all our other mainstream media repeatedly echoed this same simple conclusion in all their stories and headlines.

The vast majority of our sheep-like population absorbed the simple media message “No Missile” and went back to watching their football games and celebrity music videos, being greatly relieved to know that well-maintained 747 jumbo jets flown by leading national airlines can occasionally explode in mid-air without any external cause.

However, various disgruntled “conspiracy theorists” refused to accept these conclusions, and returned to their “crazy missile conspiracy theories,” thereby earning the heartily ridicule of the entire mainstream media, led by the New York Times. These conspiratorial suspicions even extended to the U.S. navy, which had apparently been staging military exercises in the near vicinity of the calamity, exercises that some claimed including the test-firing of anti-aircraft missiles. Indeed, a local resident later provided a home video clearly showing a missile being fired in that exact same area a few days earlier during previous naval exercises.

The entire remarkable history of this incident is persuasively set forth in an excellent twentieth-anniversary book published earlier this year by investigative journalist Jack Cashill, who has been following the case since the late 1990s, having co-authored a previous book in 2003 and also produced an earlier 2001 television documentary Silenced, now available in its entirely on YouTube.

In addition, the 2013 television documentary by a former CBS producer, whose favorable review by the New York Times marked my first introduction to the topic, was discussed at length and substantially excerpted by NPR’s Amy Goodman at Democracy Now!

Cashill is strongly affiliated with conservative publications, while someone like Goodman clearly leans toward the left, but the question of whether an American jetliner was destroyed by
a missile, and the facts then covered up by the government is a non-ideological matter, so their perspectives seem almost identical.

For anyone having less than absolute faith in the official pronouncements of our government and our media, the likely reality of what happened is hardly difficult to guess, and for those who currently maintain such naivete, I suspect it will quickly dissipate if they choose to watch the documentaries or read the books. But the loss of TWA Flight 800 is surely of no great importance to our country. Accidents do happen. A large and energetic military, eager to test its latest missile weapons, perhaps carelessly and fatally crossed paths with hundreds of unlucky travelers on their way to Paris. Some 30,000 Americans die each year in fatal car crashes, and risks are inevitable in our modern industrial society.

However, from a broader perspective, I believe that the truly horrifying aspect of the incident is the tremendous ease with which our government and its lapdog media managed to so utterly suppress the reality of what had happened—an American jumbo jet shot down by a missile—and did so although this occurred not in some obscure, faraway foreign land, but within the very sight of Steven Spielberg’s home in the exclusive Hamptons, on a flight that had just departed New York City, and despite such overwhelming physical evidence and hundreds of direct eye-witnesses. The successful cover-up is the important story, and constitutes a central subtext in all of the books and documentaries on the disaster.

Given the eyewitness testimony and other factors, it is hardly surprising that many of the initial media stories either directly referred to a missile strike or at least mentioned it as one of the main possibilities, and indeed there is some evidence that top government leaders initially assumed a terrorist attack. But President Bill Clinton was locked in the middle of his reelection campaign, and while the slaughter of Americans by terrorists might unify a nation, disasters brought about by careless military action would surely have had the opposite political impact. So it seems likely that once terrorism was ruled out and the American military believed responsible, a direct order quickly came down from the highest levels to make the missile and all evidence supporting it disappear, with all our supposedly independent federal agencies, especially the FBI, bowing to that primary directive.

As part of the standard investigation, all the debris were gathered and stored at a hangar for examination, but FBI agents were discovered spiriting away some of the most tell-tale pieces, or even caught in the wee hours of the morning hammering them into a shape that would suggest an internal rather than an external explosion. The amateur video showing the missile strike was only briefly broadcast by a cable news channel before being seized by government agents. When an investigative journalist acquired debris containing apparent missile residue and passed it along to a producer at CBS News, the evidence was quickly confiscated, with the journalist and his wife even being arrested, prosecuted, and convicted for violating an obscure law enacted to prohibit bystanders from removing souvenirs from the scene of a disaster; the veteran CBS producer who accepted the material was vilified as a “conspiracy theorist” and soon forced out of her job, her career destroyed. The written FBI reports of 278 eyewitness statements describing the missile attack were completely ignored, and in a number of cases,
later statements were actually fabricated, falsely suggesting that crucial witnesses had revised or recanted their earlier testimony.

These particular examples only scratch the surface of the massive amount of coordinated government fraud and deception that was marshalled to make a missile strike seen by hundreds of witnesses officially disappear from the historical record, and transform the destruction of TWA Flight 800 into a rather mysterious and spontaneous mid-air explosion. The *New York Times* in particular became the primary mouthpiece of the official “See No Missile” party-line, repeatedly denigrating and ridiculing all those who resisted this total rewriting of the facts and history.

This gatekeeper role of the *Times* in the cover-up became particularly crucial once the high-profile figure of Pierre Salinger entered the controversy. Salinger ranked as a full-fledged member of the political-media establishment elite, having served as President Kennedy’s press secretary and one of the most visible public figures in Camelot, then briefly as an appointed U.S. Senator from California before becoming a prize-winning journalist and the Paris Bureau Chief for ABC News. Himself half-French by birth, he had many connections to the leadership of that country, which was galvanized by the large number of French victims on the flight. French intelligence became involved, quickly acquiring some of the same voluminous missile-related evidence suppressed by its US counterpart, and passed him the information. Cashill notes that Salinger was a loyal Democrat, and perhaps as a consequence he sat on the story until after Clinton was safely reelected in November, then attempted to break it, publishing a long expose in *Paris Match*, one of France’s highest-circulation popular magazines.

If Salinger had hoped his prestigious standing and long journalistic record would insulate him from attacks, he was sorely mistaken, and instead the threat his stature and credibility posed to the cover-up unleashed an unprecedented barrage of insult, ridicule, and invective, with the *New York Times* running 18 consecutive articles attacking him, and America’s leading news magazines, *Time* and *Newsweek* adding their own denunciations. Such remarkable vilification may have partly been aimed at dissuading any other prominent figures from similarly breaking ranks and following Salinger’s lead in exposing the true facts, and if so, the effort succeeded and the cover-up held.

Prior to Salinger’s regime disloyalty, he had regularly appeared on leading American television news broadcasts and his opinions were treated with the great deference accorded to a highly-respected elder statesman; afterward he was purged and blacklisted, shunned by our elite media as a “conspiracy nut.” Indeed, upon his death a few years later, the disloyalty he had shown to his establishment colleagues seriously tainted his *NYT* obituary[5], which closed by describing the “strange turn” he had taken in advocating theories based upon “discredited” evidence.

I don’t doubt that numerous other prominent figures quietly took the lesson of Salinger’s defenestration to heart, much as high-ranking Soviet leaders noted the dire implications of questioning Stalin’s pronouncements. Indeed, I personally know of at least a couple of individuals prominently situated in our current elite establishment whose private views on various controversial topics would surely rank as “utterly conspiratorial” but who remain extremely reluctant to have those views become generally known.
Or take another example, even closer to me. My old friend Bill Odom, the three-star general who had run the NSA for Ronald Reagan, clearly ranked in the upper reaches of the DC national security establishment in the early 2000s, serving as Director of National Security Policies at the Hudson Institute and an adjunct professor at Yale. Yet his strongly discordant views on the Bush response to 9/11 and the preparations for the Iraq War caused him to be totally blacklisted from major media access[6], reduced to publishing his dissenting opinions on an obscure website or in the pages of small, socialistic quarters[7].

When naive individuals suggest that maintaining a large government conspiracy in America is simply impossible because “somebody would have talked” perhaps they should consider the implications of this incident, which occurred so close to the media capital of the world. And if they ever decide to trust Wikipedia on any remotely controversial topic, they should consult the 10,000 word Wikipedia article on TWA Flight 800[8], comparing that exhaustive presentation with the simple facts provided in this article, or the wealth of additional information in the numerous books and documentaries upon which my treatment was based.

The old Soviet Union was notoriously reluctant to ever acknowledge serious government errors, but its propaganda machinery was of mediocre quality, routinely ridiculed both in the West and among its own citizens. Surely, their Politburo members and Pravda editors would have been green with envy at how easily our own American Regime and its media minions suppressed the true story of TWA Flight 800, shot down by a missile just twelve minutes after it departed JFK Airport in New York City.

For Further Reading

- Our American Pravda[9]
- American Pravda: How the CIA Invented “Conspiracy Theories”[10]
- American Pravda: Was General Patton Assassinated?[11]
- American Pravda: Was Rambo Right?[12]

Source References

[1] the top national news story of that year =>


[4] a website discussion => http://mondoweiss.net/2013/06/democracy-documentary-borjesson/


[7] in the pages of small, socialistic quarterlies =>
http://www.niemanwatchdog.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=background.view&backgroundid=131

[8] 10,000 word Wikipedia article on TWA Flight 800 =>
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