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By Tim Dillon, USA TODAY
SAMANTHA SMITH: Died in an August 1985 plane crash

CJ

DID SAMANTHA SMITH DIE IN AN ACCIDENT?

Or Was She Murdered For Humanizing Russia And Thereby Undermining Reagan's Production Of "Russia: The Evil Empire".

Commuter airline safety questioned

By Marilyn Adams
USA TODAY

Wed Oct 1-1986
Crashes like the one that killed Samantha Smith in Maine last year might be prevented if commuter planes had to have the same safety equipment as major airline jets, federal officials said Tuesday.

An absence of key equipment — such as cockpit voice recorders — made it impossible for the National Transportation Safety Board to say for sure what caused the Bar Harbor Airlines plane crash in August, 1985, which killed Smith, 13, her father and six others.

However, the NTSB said the pilot was mostly at fault because he should have aborted his landing attempt.

The plane came in too low and crashed short of the runway at night in the rain.

The NTSB also blamed the air traffic controller who gave the pilot approach instructions.

Smith, a Manchester, Maine, schoolgirl, gained worldwide fame when she wrote late Soviet leader Yuri Andropov about her fear of nuclear war.

The board urged the FAA to force commuter airlines to carry recorders and equipment that warns a pilot when his plane is too low.

"I'm getting tired of the FAA dragging its feet," said board Chairman Jim Burnett.

Vice Chairman Patricia Goldman said the board is troubled by "common threads," such as off-course planes, in recent commuter crashes.

Steven Mason of the airline, now called Eastern Express, Tuesday said flight crew members were "experienced, respected men."

Samantha's mother, Jane Smith, has filed a \$50 million suit against the airline.

PILOT IS FAULTED IN MAINE AIR CRASH

Ruling in Accident That Killed Girl Who Visited Soviet

NYT 10/1/86

WASHINGTON, Sept. 30 (AP) — Federal investigators concluded today that the pilot of a commuter airplane that crashed in Maine, killing the schoolgirl Samantha Smith and seven other people, should not have tried to land after encountering problems in an erratic approach in the rain.

The Bar Harbor Airlines commuter plane crashed Aug. 25, 1985, just short of the Auburn-Lewiston Municipal Airport. Among the victims was the 13-year-old Maine girl whose appeal for world peace led to visit to the Soviet Union and worldwide attention.

Investigators for the National Transportation Safety Board found that the small Beech 99 aircraft's approach to the airport was extremely unstable and not properly aligned with the airport's instrument landing beacon. It also concluded that the plane was descending much too rapidly.

"The prudent thing to have done is to have exercised a missed approach" when the plane was "in the condition that it was in," said Jim Burnett, chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board.

But Mr. Burnett and another board member, Tom Lauber, said many questions remained unanswered because the plane had neither a device to record conversation in the cockpit nor one to record flight data.

"We have a lot of information missing that would help us know what went on here," Mr. Lauber said.

For example, investigators said that some navigational instruments might have become wet because of a leak in the cockpit window and that this might have affected the path of the aircraft. But the safety board report concluded that no evidence was found to substantiate an instrument failure.

In its official statement, the board attributed the accident to "the captain's continuation of an unstabilized approach."

The board said a contributing factor was improper advice on a maneuver that an air traffic controller gave the pilot when radar showed the plane not to be in line for a proper approach. But the board emphasized that the pilot was under no requirement to follow the controller's guidance.

All eight people aboard the aircraft, including Samantha Smith's father, Arthur, 45 years old, were killed as the small turboprop plane plowed into a wooded area about a half-mile short of the airport.

The Smiths were returning from a trip to England, where she had been on location with the cast of a United States television series.

Excerpts From Anthony Lewis Editorial,
October 2, 1986, The New York Times:

Reagan Administration did when Korean Air Lines Flight 007 was shot down in 1983. Seymour Hersh tells the story in gripping detail in his superb book "The Target Is Destroyed."

U.S. Air Force intelligence concluded within a day of the attack that the Russians had not known it was a civilian airliner when they shot it down. They thought it was a U.S. spy plane, an RC-135, that in fact had flown near the same area of the Soviet Union the same evening.

Without waiting for intelligence conclusions, Secretary Shultz denounced the Russians for knowingly shooting down a civilian plane. President Reagan then made a television speech about what he called the "Korean airline massacre." He said it had been a deliberate "act of barbarism," arising from the brutal nature of Soviet society. "There is no way," he said, that "a pilot could mistake this for anything other than a civilian airliner."

The Hersh book discloses that the President, before making the speech, had signed a National Security Decision Directive ordering that the Korean airline tragedy be used to darken the Soviet image. "Soviet brutality in this incident," the directive said, "presents an opportunity to reverse the false moral and political 'peacemaker' perception that their regime has been cultivating."

Within a short time there was general acceptance in the U.S. Government of the intelligence finding that the shooting down of K.A.L. 007 had been the result of Soviet mistakes, not a deliberate act. But no one corrected the hyperbolic picture of Soviet "barbarism."