

## [twa800.com](http://twa800.com) Book Review

**First Strike** by Jack Cashill and James Sanders, 2003 WND Press

First Strike is dedicated to the memory of Commander William S. Donaldson. Cdr. Donaldson spent the last years of his life trying to determine the true cause of this tragedy and his family appreciates this honor.

First Strike provides an excellent synopsis of the TWA800 crash investigation and its cover-up and proves beyond any conceivable doubt that the crash was caused by missiles and covered-up by the government. Unfortunately in the last chapter the authors stray from fact to fiction with less supporting documentation for their theory than the NTSB has for the “self exploding fuel tank”.

The first 240 of 257 pages of this book are excellent with only a few factual errors, but the authors wander off into speculation in the last chapter as they try to put the pieces together and blame the crash on the military trying to protect Flight 800 from terrorists. Unfortunately Jim Sanders had to reconcile his first two books, where he blamed a Military exercise gone awry, with the “new world order” where terrorism is seen as a real threat. Don’t get me wrong; I do believe that terrorists were responsible. They just didn’t need the help of the Navy to shoot down Flight 800.

Chapters 1-13 cover some well-plowed ground as the authors recount all the problems with the investigation. These included the withholding of 750 eyewitness interviews by the FBI, the disappearing evidence, the explosive residues, the red herring dog training exercise, the found, then missing and then found again Flight Data Recorder and Cockpit Voice Recorder, the spurious zoom-climb and the CIA video, the persecution of alternate voices and the continuous stonewalling by the government in releasing data under the Freedom of Information Act. Most importantly, they do an excellent job of tracking the evolution of the “message” from the early days in 1996 until the public hearing in August 2000. By juxtaposing the early media reports from insiders pointing to a missile and away from a mechanical cause with the final NTSB position that “there is no evidence of a bomb or missile, so it must have been a mechanical cause”, it is very clear how the investigation was manipulated.

Now let’s review some of the problems with the last chapter.

The authors speculate that the radar track seen going under Flight 800 was a 6 passenger plane piloted by a terrorist who was going to hit USAir 217 but decided it wasn’t a big enough target, then circled back to dive bomb Flight 800 with a cargo full of explosives. They further claim that the Navy P-3 Orion was actually following the small plane and they seem to confuse the P-3 sub hunter with the P-3 AWACS. Beside the obvious point that this scenario is implausible, the radar does not support it at all. The radar track that passes over Flight 800 and under USAir 217 was the P-3 and it did not do a 180-degree turn and head for Flight 800. That’s a fact. In fact, the P-3 flew on for quite some time before learning of the disaster and turning back to assist in the rescue effort. The authors make much of the crew claiming they were not initially aware of the crash because of all the sophisticated electronics on board, but they miss the point that these electronics are aimed at submarine detection, not aircraft tracking as in the AWACS version of the P-3. The radar shows that the P-3 passed over Flight 800 moments before any missiles were in the air and therefore the tragedy happened below and behind them. Since they were on their way to the operational area where their exercise was to take place, it is not surprising that they didn’t know about the crash until the FAA advised them.

Now lets look at the terrorist act itself. The terrorist aircraft was supposedly blown up right under Flight 800, yet there has never been a single piece of wreckage recovered that could not be identified as part of the 747. Where is the mystery aircraft wreckage? Furthermore, why on earth would a terrorist with a plane full of explosives try a kamikaze attack on a moving aircraft when he could more easily have struck the WTC and finished the job that Ramsey Youssef started in 1993?

As for the missiles fired that night. The authors claim they were Standard missiles from two US warships, yet there has never been a credible witness that has come forward to support this charge. When a Standard missile is launched from a US warship, everyone on board knows it instantly because of the noise and vibration. I don’t believe there is any way to keep 500-1,000 18-20 year old sailors quiet for 6 ½ years.

Also, the Standard missile does not zig-zag like those described by eyewitnesses. Furthermore, the radar picked up at least 30 other boats in the immediate area. Some of our best eyewitnesses were on boats in the same area where the authors claim the Navy warships fired missiles, yet not one eyewitness on a boat saw a Navy warship in the area at the time of the shoot down.

The authors were pretty thorough in recounting the evidence and cover-up until the last chapter, but they conveniently left out two important facts that would support terrorist shoulder-fired missiles being the culprits. First, in August 1996 several reputable newspapers reported intelligence that 3 shoulder-fired missiles had been smuggled into the US through Canada in the months prior to the crash. The authors clearly report that the MISIC analyst said that "many of the descriptions given by eyewitnesses were very consistent with the characteristics of the flight of such missiles" (MANPADs), but failed to mention that the same MISIC analysts did computer simulations of a shoulder-fired missile attack and concluded that the 747 was a "sitting duck" at 13,700 ft. Even the oldest of the US stingers, much less the longer range Russian and Chinese MANPADs could have easily brought down Flight 800. Combine this with the fact that prior to Flight 800, 26 commercial airliners have been shot down worldwide by shoulder-fired missiles and this seems to me to be the simplest and least contrived explanation for the crash. As the authors point out, Occam's Razor states; the simplest explanation of all possibilities is usually the most likely.

It is unfortunate that the authors have weakened an excellent book with wild speculation about the cause.

Bob Donaldson