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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: Hypertension, a serious disease that often goes undiagnosed, is being successfully tested for and treated in preventive programs at a growing number of work sites. See p. 377. (Illustration: Annie Lunsford)

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LETTERS

More on the MiG-25

I am writing in regard to your item "Foxbat: Demythologizing a Superplane" (SN: 10/29/76, p. 231). Personally, I would have been delighted to discover that the MiG-25 was not a formidable weapon, since all the aspects of the current massive Soviet arms buildup cause me grave concern. However, after reading your piece I feel that relief is a bit premature. Rep. Carr basically states:

(1) that the MiG-25 is barely equal to our 15-year-old F-4 Phantom (which makes me wonder how an airplane which flies hundreds of miles per hour faster and thousands of feet higher than the F-4 can be "barely equal" to it, particularly since the reconnaissance version of the MiG-25 has been overflying Israeli airspace with impunity as far as Israeli F-4s were concerned);

(2) that the MiG-25 is very good as a recon aircraft, but we have better (although he doesn't mention that we have the grand total of 18 SR-71A Blackbirds flying plus a few dozen in storage, because they are too expensive to fly, while the Soviets have been producing MiG-25s for years);

(3) that as an interceptor the MiG-25 is inadequate and obsolete because it lacks "look-down" radar (although I was under the possibly mistaken impression that our interceptors also lacked this capacity, and that was one of the reasons why the Defense Department was seeking to obtain AWACS aircraft like the Tupolev "Moss" which the Soviets have been flying for some time now);

(4) that the avionics in the MiG-25 were of the vacuum-tube generation (which may be true, but could still make you wonder how they succeeded at mating the Soyuz with Apollo, or how they have managed to MIRV three new ICBMs well in advance of our predictions and thereby eliminate our major protective element in the last SALT agreement);

(5) that the MiG-25 has been stripped of essential safety equipment to save weight (which brings to mind the Japanese Mitsubishi Zero-sen, which was also constructed in that fashion and which won many a battle before we were able to create a better plane);

(6) that as a result of all of the above plus a lack of maneuverability imposed through the use of speeds above mach 2.5, the expected kill-rate in any confrontation between our fighters and the MiG-25 would be incal-

NOTE TO READERS

Following our custom of the past three years, we will combine the final two issues of 1976 into one double-sized year-end issue containing, in addition to our usual news and features, a review of the top science stories of 1976. The issue will be dated Dec. 18/25 and mailed on Dec. 23.

—The Editor.

culably in our favor. Normally, "incalculable" is not usually the word used to describe the odds in combat unless (in the case of the airplane) one opponent has a machine that is considerably faster and capable of flying considerably higher than the other. In the case in question, it is the MiG pilot who has the speed and height advantage, not the U.S. pilot.

I suspect that the whole piece was really a bit of "political" science designed to discredit the Defense Department among people who are not familiar with aviation matters. There are many noted aviation writers in Washington who would be more than happy to contribute if given the opportunity to review "news" releases like this one; you really ought to give them the chance so that a more balanced presentation could be made.

Richard N. Sullivan
Norris Data Service
Landing, N.J.

Immunity in tooth decay

I was quite excited to read of T. Lehner and his team's work on a role of the body's immune system in preventing tooth decay (SN: 11/20/76, p. 329). It closely parallels an observation of my own. I grew up where there was a wide variation in individual dental care. When little care was given to primary teeth, these individuals often had little trouble with secondary teeth. Much care of "baby" teeth seemed to result in the development of "cavities" early in the life of secondary teeth.

I concluded that one function of primary teeth, not generally recognized, is to give the body exposure to tooth decay bacteria and/or enzymes which led to natural immunity to them. Care of, filling of "cavities" in, primary teeth could delay antibody production well into the life of the secondary teeth, and thus may be unwise as a result of increased decay in the more important "permanent" teeth.

Brent Lathrop
Davis, Calif.

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