al combat. Almost 800 more were damaged in the China-Burma Theater.

In the European and Mediterranean theaters, Army Air Forces fighters scored non-lethal hits on some 4,000 Axis planes, including twin- and multi-engine bombers.

Over Korea, U.S. Air Force fighters (mostly F-86 Sabres) also had six .50s, firing at a higher cyclic rate than WW II. They damaged nearly 1,000 Communist aircraft – mostly MiG-15 jets.

The foregoing figures total some 6,700 enemy aircraft hosed by multi-gun batteries firing .50-caliber ammunition: ball, tracer, armor-piercing, and/or incendiary.

So: how much damage can be expected from one, two, or maybe five .50 caliber rounds on a jet airliner?

You can figure it for yourself. It ranges from insignificant on the high end to nonexistent on the low end.

Meanwhile, instead of banning rifles that pose no credible threat, the opponents of personal firearms should look elsewhere. By far the most serious threat to aircraft is the shoulder-mounted antiaircraft missile generically called MANPADS (man-portable air defense system). The best known are the American Stinger and Soviet-designed SA-7 and later heat-seeking missiles, effective against jet airplanes and helicopters. A generic MANPADS brochure states that it can hit a 700 mph target above 15,000 feet.

When the NATO operation in Libya approached its climax, apparently nobody in Brussels or in Washington considered that the late-unlamented Moammar/Muammar Gaddafi/Gaddafi (however his name was spelled) accumulated tons of them. Press accounts noted that some 20,000 disappeared when the rebels seized the terrorist colonel’s armories. Perhaps NATO could have prevented or minimized the theft, perhaps not. In any case, failure to do so represents a gigantic “Oops!” that may return to haunt Western frequent fliers for years to come.

A couple of steps down the technological ladder are rocket-propelled grenades, which the former “Evil Empire” exported in bulk. They have proven highly effective, destroying a dozen or more helicopters in Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, no civilian casualties are known inflicted by privately owned .50s, and certainly no airliners have been damaged.

However, if anyone wants to address criminal activity involving .50s, recall that under “Fast and Furious” BATFE not only permitted but encouraged dealers to sell them into Mexico, without an export license. Under federal law that’s a felony violation of the Arms Export Control Act and the International Traffic in Arms regulations. Maximum penalty is 10 years and $10,000.

Just thought we’d mention it.