

Lockerbie trial takes dramatic turn

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The trial of the two Libyans accused of blowing up Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988 has been adjourned until May 23. Last Sunday, newspapers in Britain reported that “dramatic new evidence” presented shortly before the trial began casts severe doubt on official explanations of the explosion. According to the *Sunday Times*, sources close to the case have indicated that this “was a significant factor in the prosecution's request for an adjournment”.

Edwin Bollier, a key prosecution witness, is the owner of the Swiss firm MEBO, manufacturers of a timing device alleged to have been used to trigger the explosion. In a news release dated May 2, the company web site [<http://www.mebocom-defilee.ch/news.html>] asserts, “MEBO AG already has more than sufficient proof that the alleged fragment from the MEBO MST-13-timer is from a non-functioning PC-board.”

MEBO's study of the explosion suggests that it took place in a radically different site than was previously supposed, within the skin of the aircraft rather than concealed in the aluminium luggage container. The MEBO statement claims, “Very recently received highly sensitive photographs and technical information fully confirmed the several year-long MEBO inquiry and analysis ... that the alleged explosion originated from an impact directly on the skin of the Pan Am 103 fuselage, and not from within the luggage container AVE 4041 PA.”

The company's web site has also posted a picture [<http://www.mebocom-defilee.ch/pictures2.html>] showing where they believe the explosive was placed. The MEBO report concludes by calling for a new investigation into its allegations, and is offering a reward of up to \$10,000,000 “for any evidence-information about the Lockerbie air-disaster”. Should its findings be verified, the report continues, the charges against Abdelbaset Ali Muhammad Al-Megrahi and Al Amin Khalifa Fhimah, accused of

killing 259 passengers and crew, as well as 11 residents of the Scottish village, should be dropped and efforts made to find out who would have been in a position to plant the bomb within the Boeing's structure immediately prior to its final flight.

MEBO point out that the US frequently cite “national security” when refusing to release information relating to Lockerbie. This sensitivity is in contrast to the US reaction to the downed TWA 747 that crashed off the coast of New York in 1996, also in mysterious circumstances, the company claims.

US investigators allegedly found a fragment of the timer device more than two years after the bombing. Allegations have been made that the US framed Libya for the bombing, in order to divert attention from Iran, which the US was developing as its ally in the Middle East as a counterweight to Iraq. The Crown Prosecution office denied claims that the prosecution's case is close to collapse.

The defence team has concentrated on undermining evidence implicating Libya in the bombing. The accused have also mounted a “special defence of incrimination” which, under Scottish law, allows them to point to those they believe to be guilty. They have named members of the Syrian-based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command (PFLP-GC) and the Palestine Popular Struggle Front who oppose the peace settlement with Israel negotiated by the PLO, as responsible for the explosion. One of those cited, Abu Talb, is presently in a Swedish gaol for bombings in Sweden and Denmark. Many of those initially investigating the crash believed the Lockerbie bombing to be a reprisal for the unprovoked attack by the USS *Vincennes* on a civilian Iranian Airbus in which 290 innocent people died. The Iranian government promised revenge attacks at the time and it is alleged that it reached an agreement with the PFLP to this end.

During questioning in the opening days of the trial a detective involved in the investigation, Gordon Ferrie, agreed that the PFLP-GC has quickly been the focus of early enquiries. Questioned by defence counsel William Taylor, a local police superintendent, Geoffrey Carpenter—who was for several hours the senior police officer at the crash scene—acknowledged that it had been extremely difficult to secure the site. Wreckage from the crash was scattered over 845 square miles of moor and farmland, stretching from the small village of Lockerbie to the North Sea. Over 40,000 pieces of debris, ranging from large chunks of aeroplane to tiny fragments, were collected over the following months, identified as well as was possible and collated in a military warehouse in Longtown set aside for the purpose.

Carpenter said that journalists had arrived at the scene within 90 minutes and that FBI officers were present by the next day. Another police officer, Alexander Maclean, agreed that FBI and CIA agents had been quickly present, and had been actively gathering material from the wreckage, which had all been meticulously logged. But another policeman, Gordon Roxburgh, raised that there were concerns that the material removed had not been properly logged. Retired policeman Gordon Comerford also noted that there had been "concern about sensitive material and its recovery" as several intelligence officials had been aboard the aircraft.

The defence raised queries about the inaccurate logging of items such as pieces of the suitcase alleged to have contained the bomb. Police officer Duncan McInnes admitted that, overwhelmed by the scale of the task, police labelling had been erratic, clear mistakes had been made and that in some instances it had been impossible to accurately track the location, date or identity of the finder of particular items. One important piece of evidence, a singed instruction manual for the Toshiba cassette player that had allegedly contained the bomb, was found in a field 70 miles from Lockerbie. Gwendoline Horton, who found it, could not subsequently identify the evidence presented to her as the manual she had retrieved. Robert Ingram, a civilian search and rescue worker, told the court that police visited him months after the crash to encourage him to sign a form agreeing he had found items that he could not remember finding.

In a related development, lawyers for 200 relatives have launched a claim in the US courts for \$4 billion damages against the Libyan government and the intelligence services. The case, which was initially filed four years ago, was aimed at seizing some of the \$630 million of Libyan assets frozen 14 years ago by the US government, but was left standing for lack of evidence. The claim has now been revived in the hope that the present case would provide more evidence against the Libyan government.

For the full translated report from MEBO AG as presented to the Crown April 24, 2000 see:

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/5260/ebolrepo500.html>



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