

Retired admiral says missile may have caused TWA crash

Naval experts cite flight data from recorder

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Retired Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, shown in this 1967 file photo, said all evidence in the disintegration of TWA Flight 800 points to a missile.

WASHINGTON — Adm. Thomas Moorer, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said yesterday that it's possible a missile brought down TWA Flight 800 and called for new congressional hearings.

The Boeing 747 disintegrated July 17, 1996, and plunged into the Atlantic Ocean near Long Island, N.Y., killing 230.

Moorer and other retired Navy brass, at a press conference, expressed grave suspicion over the FBI's recently concluded 18-month investigation of the disaster. They said a missile explosion just outside the 747's forward cabin seems the likely cause.

"All evidence would point to a missile," said Moorer, who is an expert on missile weaponry. "All those witnesses who saw a streak that hit the airplane — you have to assume it's a

missile. In an investigation like this, you can't overlook anything."

Joseph Valiquette, FBI spokesman in New York, said the agency is "comfortable" with its conclusions that "there's no evidence a criminal act was responsible."

The Navy officers said a new study of evidence from Flight 800's data recorders rebuts the government's official story about fuel vapors exploding in a central tank of the jetliner.

"This is either a train wreck in the sky, or an explosive device — mid-air, outside the plane," said retired Navy Cmdr. William Donaldson, a former plane crash investigator.

Donaldson examined the mountain of material released in early December about the federal investigation. He particularly criticized one National Transportation Safety Board docu-

ment reflecting flight recorder data that was not discussed when the material was unveiled in Baltimore.

Donaldson noted a line drawn through readings of the last five seconds of the doomed jet's flight, with a handwritten margin note reading "End of Flt. 800 DATA" — except there are more revealing readings below it. He thinks this was an attempt to divert attention from the final readings on the flight recorder.

He said safety officials later tried to convince the Navy officers it was a transcript from an earlier flight — a conclusion former TWA pilot Howard Mann said is "not possible — it's erased — there's just no way."

The final readings show chaos in the sky — with airspeed dropping instantly by almost 200 knots, the pitch angle jumping five degrees, altitude dropping 3,600 feet in about three seconds, the roll angle going from zero to 144 degrees (the plane almost inverted), and magnetic heading changing from 82 degrees to 163 degrees.

Donaldson said all these indicate an extremely high-pressure wave coming from the lower left side of the plane's front. The measurements "indicate there was an explosion — a big explosion — outside the cockpit."

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