

Retired officers fire missile theory back into TWA case

By John Hanchette
and Billy House
Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — Retired

admiral Thomas Moore, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called Thursday for new congressional hearings into TWA Flight 800.

The plane disintegrated July 17, 1996, en route to Paris and plunged into the Atlantic near Long Island, killing 230.

"This time, I wouldn't let the FBI do it," Moore said. "I'd have the NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) do it."

Moore and other retired Navy brass, at a news conference, expressed suspicion over the FBI's 18-month investigation of the disaster.

"All evidence would point to a missile," said Moore. Moore, an expert on missile weaponry, attended the news

conference convened by a media watchdog group that scoffs at the NTSB and FBI findings.

Joseph Vailiquette, 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 — who appeared with a veteran TWA pilot, two witnesses and members of Accuracy in Media, which coordinated the briefing

— said a study of evidence from recovered Flight 800 data recorders rebuts the government's official story about fuel vapors exploding in a central tank of the jetliner after a spark from unknown causes.

The retired officers speculated a missile could have come from either a submarine or a buoy device developed by the Navy years ago to float attack missiles into position for launch from miles away. "One

vital question we haven't attacked is the origin of that streak of light," said Moore.

Shelly Hazle, a spokeswoman for the NTSB, scoffed at allegations made at the press conference. "Their interpretation of the data from the flight data recorder only displays their lack of knowledge of how FDRs work and how data is interpreted."

Contributing: Scott Bowles