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EMBASSY OF IRELAND



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FAX 8/6

Ref: C4/11
Date: 10 June 1996
To: [REDACTED]
For: [REDACTED]
No of pages, inc. this one: 5

From: [REDACTED]
From: [REDACTED]

Re: Desmond Boomer

Regards.
[REDACTED]

Encl.

fm h:\consular\fax.hq



CONSULATE OF IRELAND
MARSOVIN,
The Winery,
Marsa PLA 01,
Malta.

Fax Cover Sheet

DATE: June 10, 1996 **TIME:** 11:51 AM
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FROM: [REDACTED] **PHONE:** [00356-824918/20]
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RE: [Desmond Boomer Case]

Number of pages including cover sheet: [THREE]

Message

[REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

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Missing Piper Lance inquiry

Search started four hours after plane failed to arrive

The first plane in the search and rescue mission for six men reported missing after a single-engine plane disappeared on its way to Malta from Tunisia left between 10 a.m. and 10.30 a.m., more than four hours after it was due to land, the department of civil aviation's operations director told an inquiry yesterday.

DCA director Joseph Sultana told the public inquiry headed by Dr Philip Sciberras:

"I was asleep at home when the air traffic controller on duty called me at 6.30 a.m. with the news that a plane due from Djerba on December 3 had failed to come in.

"Edward Mangion told me the plane had left at 3.45 a.m. from Tunisia and should have landed at 6 a.m. The exact flight time was one hour and 50 minutes.

"We discussed what could have happened and went on alert. A call for ships who might have been in the vicinity and intercepted some kind of distress signal was also made.

"Between 6.45 a.m. and 7 a.m. I called my superiors, the director-general and Colonel Vassallo of the AFM search and rescue."

Sharon Spiteri

"I left home at 7.10 a.m., got to the site at 7.30 a.m. and told Colonel Vassallo to start a search as quickly as possible.

"On my way to the office, it dawned on me that the AFM might not have suitable planes for search and rescue so I contacted Excelair.

"The pilots from Excelair and the AFM people met and discussed the situation. By that time it was about 8 a.m.

"The first flight went out between 10 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. because of the time it takes to organise oneself," the director said.

He yesterday continued giving evidence in the inquiry into the disappearance of the Piper Lance plane piloted by Carmel Bartolo and carrying Philip Farrugia, Matthew Aquilina, Mike Williams, Desmond Boomer and Tadeus Goray.

Mr Sultana said the plane's certificate of maintenance was kept with the log book on the ground and that as far as he knew no copy was kept on the aircraft.

The plane was certified under the public transport category.

But Captain Frans Sturmeier remarked that the certificate should have been in duplicate and kept on the plane and on ground.

Mr Sultana said there were no flight limitations on the certificate of airworthiness. The law carried the limitations, and one had to abide by them. It was not necessary for the limitations to be repeated on the certificate, he said.

The operations director yesterday morning faxed the Tunisian authorities with a formal request for a copy of a tape recording the contacts made between Tunisian Air Traffic Control and the pilot.

The board of inquiry in the afternoon made a formal request for the original tape to be allowed to be used and sent to the Air Accident Investigations Branch of Farnborough in the UK for an expert analysis of the tape.

The Tunisian chief inspector of accidents was also asked to provide the Maltese authorities with a report of an inquiry held in Tunis

yesterday morning, Mr Sultana said.

The inquiry, with members Captain Sturmeier and Louis Ghordmaina, continues on June 11.

The Times of Malta

7th June 1996

Missing Piper Lance inquiry

Excerpts from conversation 'do not make sense'

Excerpts from a transcript of a conversation between Tunisian Air Traffic Control and the Maltese pilot of a missing plane "do not make sense," the Civil Aviation Department operations director said yesterday.

Joseph Sultana told a public inquiry: "The last remarks by Tunisian Air Traffic Control do not make sense to me. There is no record of contact by the pilot but TATC seem to be replying to something he said."

Mr Sultana testified before Dr Philip Sciberras, who is heading the public inquiry into the disappearance of a single-engine plane piloted by Carmel Bartolo and carrying five people last December 2.

The light plane went missing on a flight between Malta and Tunisia with pilot Bartolo, Philip Farrugia, Matthew Aquilina, Mike Williams, Desmond Boomer and Tadeus Gorny.

The operations director was referring to the following excerpts:

At 03:56 GMT

Pilot: BU estimated transfer FIR (Flight Information Region) boundary 10.

TATC: 04:10 (GMT)

Pilot: Affirmative.

TATC: Call reaching. (Call when you reach boundary.)

Pilot: BU will do.

At 04:06:47 GMT

(one minute before plane was due to make contact)

TATC: BU position.

At 04:08:50 GMT

TATC: SH ABU Djerba

At 04:10:14 GMT

TATC: SH ABU position...

At 04:14 GMT

Sharon Spiteri

TATC: BU Roger, you change with Malta.

(?) Pilot: Uniform.

The last two lines were highlighted by the operations director as not making sense.

"I can only take it that TATC assumed that the pilot could listen in but was not able to transmit," Mr Sultana said.

He explained that about 20 minutes later, TATC contacted Malta to see if the plane had made contact with Malta air traffic control.

Mr Sultana's remarks led Dr Malcolm Pace, who is appearing for the pilot's heirs, to make a formal request for "Tunisian authorities to provide the tape or a copy of the tape of the communications between the pilot and Tunisian authorities regarding the incident".

The authorities will be asked to at least confirm that the tapes are still available.

Mr Sultana presented a copy of the plane's certificate of air worthiness. The certificate was first issued on January 15, 1992. The last entry was dated January 15, 1995 and covered the period from January 16, 1995 to January 15, 1996.

He also presented a copy of the plane's certificate of registration dated January 15, 1990.

Mr Sultana said the pilot had been to the Tunisian meteorological office twice. Once at 20:00 GMT on December 2 and another time on December 3 at 08:00 GMT.

The second time he told the weatherman briefing him he was not going to take the weather report.

The DCA man said the department did not have record of the pilot's qualifications and had sent for copies to the United States Federal Aviation Administration.

The US FAA had transmitted the pilot's commercial pilot licence by fax. The pilot was also a certified flight instructor, the department learnt from documents sent by the FAA.

An air traffic controller on duty on December 2, Edmond Mangion described how ATC were first alerted to the fact that the plane might have gone missing.

"We were expecting a Piper Lance plane from Djerba. At 04:11 GMT we got a message from Tunis saying the aircraft had never signalled passing over the exit boundary."

"After about an hour, with nothing being seen on short-range radar, we contacted search and rescue and told them we had an aircraft we thought might have gone missing."

Asked how short range the radar was, Mr Mangion said it showed a radius of up to 40 nautical miles. The exact time of departure was 03:45 GMT.

"Did the Tunisians indicate there had been contact with the plane?" he was asked.

"The aircraft was reported as taking off at 03:46 GMT so I am assuming there was clearance for take-off."

(Continued on page 8)

The Times of Malta

6th June 1996

Missing Piper Lance Inquiry

(Continued from page 1)

Mr Mangion explained that being a stormy night 30 minutes without contact was acceptable. But any time after that the air traffic control would have tried to check if there was contact failure. However it was the aircraft's responsibility to initiate contact.

When asked, Mr Mangion said the aircraft could have vanished just after take-off.

He was also asked about an incident in which the same plane was found to have deviated from its flight plan.

"The same plane piloted by the same man had previously been on a night flight from Djarba. We noticed the aircraft and gave it its code to transmit. When we made contact we found it was in Libyan airspace," Mr Mangion said.

Dr Joseph Brincat, appearing for Matthew Aquilina's heirs, then said his clients had been informed that the Maltese government had not even requested the full documentation of the Tunisian inquiry into the accident.

The inquiry continues this afternoon.

cont.

The Times of Malta

6th June 1996.