

Beat: News

Stray missile caused 1980 plane crash off Italy, top court rules

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USPA News - An Italian passenger plane which crashed into the Mediterranean Sea near Sicily in June 1980, killing all 81 passengers and crew members, was caused by a stray missile, the country's top criminal court ruled on Monday. It remains one of the most enduring aviation mysteries.

The accident happened on June 27, 1980, when Itavia Flight 870 crashed into the Tyrrhenian Sea while on a domestic flight from Bologna in northern Italy to Palermo on the island of Sicily in southern Italy. The wreckage was found near the island of Ustica and scattered over a wide area, leading investigators to conclude that the DC-9 jetliner exploded in mid-air. On Monday, the Supreme Court of Cassation ruled there is clear evidence that a stray missile caused the airliner to crash, but it remains unclear where the missile came from. Italian courts usually take weeks or months before they publish their reasoning behind rulings, and as such few other details were immediately available. The ruling faulted civil and military radar systems for failing to guarantee the safety of flights. The court, which is usually seen as the major court of last resort, ordered the Italian government to pay damages to the families of all 81 victims and referred the case to a lower appeals court in Palermo to determine the amount of compensation. The deadly plane crash remains one of the most enduring aviation mysteries, but many Italians believe the exact cause of the crash was covered up for security reasons. A number of investigations over the years has led to several possible causes, including a stray missile, an in-flight bomb explosion, and a collision with a fighter jet. One popular theory claims the jetliner was caught up in a dogfight between NATO aircraft and a Libyan jet, although both the Libyan government and NATO countries have denied being involved. The theory suggests a French aircraft fired a missile at the Libyan jet, which was possibly carrying Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, but accidentally struck Flight 870. The discovery of a Libyan Air Force MiG-23 aircraft near the town of Catanzaro in the southern Italian highlands, nearly a month after the crash of Flight 870, added to the mystery. The aircraft, carrying only its pilot, had apparently managed to slip unnoticed into Italian air space before running out of fuel. But some have claimed the pilot's body was already decomposed when the wreckage was found, leading them to believe that the MiG-23 went down at the time of the Flight 870 incident.

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