

# Pan Am 103: Conflicting evidence in Lockerbie trial concerning location of bomb

Steve James  
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Testimony in the trial of the two Libyans accused of blowing up Pan Am Flight 103 in 1988 has deepened speculation regarding the bomb's location in the airplane and exposed divisions among the original air accident investigators.

Last week, prosecution witnesses robustly defended their view that the bomb that brought down the Boeing 747 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie, killing 259 passengers and crew as well as 11 local residents, had been in luggage container AVE 4041. The prosecution maintains that the two Libyan defendants, Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed Al Megrahi and Al Amin Khalifa Fhimah, had loaded a suitcase containing the bomb onto a feeder flight in Malta, which was then transferred onto Flight 103 at Frankfurt. This scenario rests on the assumption that the bomb was located inside a suitcase. If it was not, then the prosecution's charges against the two Libyans is in danger of collapse

Peter Claydon, one of the Air Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) team looking into the disaster, explained that investigators came to the conclusion the bomb was in a suitcase after studying the pattern of damage to container AVE 4041 and the rest of the surrounding aircraft. Blast damage was most concentrated around the rear quarter of the container, beside the aircraft's hull. Claydon, pressed by the prosecution lawyers, stated several times that he was certain that the "event" took place inside the container. He disagreed with a defence suggestion that damage to the neighbouring container, AVN 7511PA, pointed to the blast occurring outside AVE 4041. He also stated that he thought the luggage item containing the explosive was not on the floor of the container, as the floor showed signs of having been protected from the direct effects of the blast by another piece of luggage. He explained how he found a tiny charred fragment of a

circuit board lodged in the container's marker plate.

Claydon's testimony was followed by that of Ian Cullis, an explosives expert, and Christopher Peel, both from the UK's Defence Research Establishment (DERA). Their names do not appear on the list of contributors to the initial AAIB report. Cullis claimed that the sooting of the container remains, and pitting in both the fuselage and container, showed that the explosion had taken place inside the container. He said that deformations of the container floor again pointed to another piece of luggage having been forced into the floor by a blast above it. Peel, who has subsequently worked on a research project into the effects of small bombs on pressurised aircraft, narrated a video on the results of this work, which including exploding 450g of plastic explosive inside a Boeing 747. He claimed that using complex mathematical calculations, he could accurately place the bomb inside the luggage container.

Defence lawyer Richard Keen QC said to Peel, "You have not simply developed an analytical model, but gone back and altered your view of the facts in order to apply the analytical model."

Later, during three days of cross-examination, Peel admitted to Alan Turnbull QC that an earlier calculation put the bomb 17 inches from the aircraft hull, rather than the 24 inches currently suggested by Peel, and other analytical models suggested a distance of as little as 12 inches.

The three investigators' evidence directly contradicts analyses made by another prosecution witness, Edmund Bollier of MEBO AG, the Swiss electronics firm who manufactured the timer alleged to have triggered the explosion. Bollier has claimed in two reports that the bomb was attached directly to the aircraft's hull.

Bollier's claims were strengthened by the testimony of accident investigator Christopher Protheroe, who

was a member of the AIIB team along with Claydon.

The 1990 report from the AAIB team [<http://www.open.gov.uk/aaib/n739pa.htm>] was quite clear in locating the bomb inside container AVE 4041, reassembled from fragments scattered around the Scottish countryside. But Protheroe admitted in court that there had been a significant mathematical error in the official report of the accident. According to his examination of the "Mach stem" effect used to calculate blast wave effects after an initial explosion, correct calculations would place the bomb 12 inches from the fuselage and therefore outside luggage container AVE 4041. After Protheroe's testimony the court adjourned so the remains of the shredded container could be assembled inside the courtroom.

The recent resignation of the head of Glasgow University's Lockerbie Trial Briefing Unit, Andrew Fulton, following his exposure as a long-standing MI6 operative points to the US and UK intelligence services maintaining an acute interest in Pan Am 103 from the moment it crashed until the present trial. The Briefing Unit was set up in late 1998 to provide "impartial" advice on the legal aspects of the Lockerbie trial and has been contacted by many representatives of the world's media. Fulton, a British diplomat for 30 years, had been MI6 station chief in Washington DC in his last position. He was appointed to the unit 18 months ago as a "visiting law professor", despite his complete lack of legal experience. He was placed in charge of press briefings and controlled the flow of information from the unit.



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