



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on June 26, 2013

TWA Flight Conspiracy Theories Advanced in New EPIX Channel Video

The EPIX cable television channel [will air](#) the documentary *TWA Flight 800* on July 17, a video that claims the official investigation over the 1996 airline disaster needs to be reopened because of new evidence. The New York-to-Paris flight exploded less than two minutes after take-off, killing all 230 passengers and crew aboard the plane.

The official National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) [investigation concluded](#) that the explosion of TWA Flight 800 on July 17, 1996 was likely a result of an electrical short that ignited a fuel tank on the wing of the Boeing 747 aircraft. Fueling speculation about the TWA Flight 800 tragedy was the remarkably safe flight history of the Boeing 747 fleet; no 747 had seen a mid-wing fuel tank explode in the more than 25 years of flights before that time, or since.



The video's producers [concluded](#), according to *Time* magazine, that they have "reviewed the FAA radar evidence along with new evidence not available to the NTSB during the official investigation and [they] contend that the NTSB's probable cause determination is erroneous and should be reconsidered."

Aviation journalist William J. McGee at Time.com [wrote](#) that "There may be enough smoking guns to warrant reopening the investigation." McGee concluded after watching the documentary, "Although I'm not ready to support all the film's premises, after watching the documentary, I believe there are enough smoking guns to warrant an unbiased reexamination. What surprises me, although I suppose it shouldn't, is the rush to slam the movie sight unseen.... It's time that journalists and government officials alike recognize the best way to quell public doubts is to encourage further investigation. And let the results speak for themselves."

McGee's view is not unanimous among the documentary's viewers. *Popular Mechanics* magazine published a [persuasive article](#) dismissing the documentary as "conspiracy theory." Of course, conspiracy theories are commonplace and real, from the Mafia to Mexican drug gangs to 19 hijackers conspiring to hijack airplanes and fly them into buildings on September 11, 2001. Newspaper reporters generally dismiss as "conspiracy theories" only the conspiracy theories they don't believe in. And if anything has become apparent in recent months — as it was revealed the IRS has been targeting conservative political groups and the NSA is monitoring the telephone and Internet habits of the entire American public — is that even conspiracy theorists such as radio talk show host Alex Jones may have been insufficiently paranoid about their government's mendacity.

One person who doesn't believe there was a conspiracy in the Flight 800 investigation is John Goglia,



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one of the NTSB Board members wrote the 1999 NTSB report on Flight 800. Goglia published a defense of the NTSB findings in a [Forbes magazine op-ed](#), stressing that “If an explosion had occurred outside the aircraft while it was in flight, aircraft damage inside the aircraft would have shown a pattern of blast fragments coming from outside the aircraft. Aircraft debris from inside the fuselage did not contain evidence of such an explosion. Nor did the aircraft skin around the fuselage. This skin is relatively thin and easy to damage and would have shown evidence of an explosion.... While the film claims to have the radar data from five different locations surrounding the accident site, it has no radar evidence to support any missile launch, let alone two or three. In my opinion, the eyewitness accounts are less reliable than the radar data. Period.”

Goglia [stressed](#) in his *Forbes* op-ed that the NTSB study had only concluded that the electrical short/fuel tank explosion was a “probable cause” explanation of the disaster: “New and substantial evidence could warrant re-opening of the investigation. I do not believe the film or petition to the NTSB raises any new evidence and its three-missiles-brought-down-the-aircraft theory is just plain ridiculous.”

The documentary’s authors — independent producer [Kristina Borjesson](#) and Tom Stalcup of the [Flight 800 Independent Researchers Group](#) — interviewed various officials who were part of the official investigation and eyewitnesses to the explosion.

In one segment, Borjesson asks former NTSB senior accident investigator Hank Hughes to give his analysis of why Flight 800 exploded. Hughes’ [response](#):

The primary — primary conclusion was the explosive forces came from outside the airplane, not the center fuel tank.

Borjesson noted that the NTSB report ignored eyewitness accounts in its reports during an [interview](#) with the leftist *Democracy Now!* internet-based video channel: “The significance of it is that it is the hard evidence that has been reviewed and is being presented by the government’s own former, you know, members of the official investigation. And the other thing is, is that for the first time the eyewitnesses are brought in as a credible piece of the investigation. And as you know, in any investigation, it doesn’t matter whether it’s cops or reporters or whatever, the key to those investigations are firsthand sources, evidence and eyewitnesses.”

Co-producer Tom Stalcup [stressed](#) in the same interview that “The eyewitnesses reported something going up, heading out down towards that airplane, a long distance, colliding with it in a perpendicular fashion, detonating near or at the aircraft.”

But the skin of the aircraft left no evidence it had received a blow from a missile, according to the [original 2000 NTSB report](#): “Only two holes had any characteristics of high-velocity penetration, and these holes also exhibited some low-velocity penetration characteristics. Both holes were about 3/16 inch in diameter ... [and] on the basis of the direction of the penetrations and their locations relative to each other, it was determined that the penetrating objects for the two holes did not originate from a common point, nor did they originate from a point outside the airplane.”

The movie reportedly hypothesizes that three missiles — two from sea and one from land — may have been fired at the aircraft that had just lifted off from John F. Kennedy International Airport. Commander William Donaldson, USN (Ret.), explained the three-missile theory in an [interview with The New American](#) magazine back on December 4, 2000.

There are three major problems with the three-missile theory, however: One, it revolves around eyewitness accounts, which are traditionally unreliable in tragedies. Two, the radar evidence is



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inconsistent at best for missile attacks.

Finally, there's the problem of motive. If the alleged missile attack had been an accident as a result of a Navy exercise — say with some top secret, new weapon with a minimal radar signature — three missiles from different platforms would not make any sense. And if the Navy fired three missiles at one civilian jetliner, it could not be an accident. And if it were done deliberately, why this plane? What was so special about this particular aircraft? And why never use the same assassination tactic again?

Alternatively, if it had been a terrorist attack (and it would have been the most deadly terror attack in U.S. history prior to 9/11), why waste three missiles fired at the same plane? And if three missiles were fired by terrorists — and only one or two hit the plane — where is the radar track for the errant missiles? No one has claimed that there is a radar record for these alleged missiles that failed to hit the target. Nor has any terrorist group ever claimed responsibility for TWA Flight 800.

Photo of Boeing 747-100 N93119, the TWA Flight 800 aircraft, in 1982



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