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This still shot, from historical footage recorded at the scene of the Tenerife disaster, depicts Pan Am 1736 after it was struck by KLM 4805. Both planes were fully loaded with fuel at the time of the collision.

After striking the Pan Am jet, 4805's landing gear sheared off. Information from flight data recorders (also called "the black box") tell what happened next.

The KLM 747 dropped back to the runway about 500 feet from impact and skidded another 1,000 feet, sliding to the right and rotating clockwise 90 degrees. As soon as it stopped, a violent fire engulfed the whole wreckage, utterly disintegrating the plane. No one escaped the inferno.

Seventy people were able to get out of the Pan Am plane, although nine died later. Most made it to the left wing, then jumped to the ground from there.

When tower personnel heard the explosion, they thought terrorists had blown up a fuel truck. Not until they received reports of fire on the airport's runway did they realize the explosion (this link contains an on-the-scene BBC audio/visual report) must have been from a plane.

Fire and rescue personnel had difficulty making their way through the congested, foggy airport. After they found the KLM plane completely engulfed in flames, rescue workers noticed another fire down the runway. They believed they saw burning parts from the same plane. Not until fire personnel reached the Pan Am plane did they realize the magnitude of the disaster. The inferno was not completely extinguished until the next day.

The Tenerife crash still stands as the world's worst aviation accident. Five hundred eighty-three (583) people died. Seven of the 16 Pan Am crew survived, including Captain Grubbs.

The Spanish government found that Captain van Zanten was responsible. The Dutch investigation also assigned responsibility to Tenerife's controllers. The official Spanish investigation also reports that:

It was not possible to perform autopsies on the members of the KLM crew on account of the state of the bodies.

Captain van Zanten's scream was the last thing recorded on the cockpit voice recorder. All of the KLM evacuation doors remained sealed. A likely explanation? There was either no time to attempt escape or no possibility to even try.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/INFERNO-Tenerife-Deadliest-Air-Accident>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/INFERNO-Tenerife-Deadliest-Air-Accident>

Media Stream



The Collision

Image online, courtesy the PBS.org [website](#).

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Collision>



KLM 4805 Disintegrates Following Impact and Fire

Historical television footage.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/KLM-4805-Disintegrates-Following-Impact-and-Fire>



Aircraft Disintegration

Historical television footage.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Aircraft-Disintegration>



Escape from the Pan Am Plane

Historical television footage.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Escape-from-the-Pan-Am-Plane>



Path of Escape from Pan Am 1736

Historical television footage of the crash site.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Path-of-Escape-from-Pan-Am-1736>



Disintegration of the Aircraft

Image online, courtesy the tenerifecrash.com website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Disintegration-of-the-Aircraft>



Exploding Plane

Accident investigation photo.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Exploding-Plane>



Investigators Sift Through Crash Scene Debris

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Investigators-Sift-Through-Crash-Scene-Debris>



Fire and Rescue Workers at the Crash Scene

Image online, courtesy *Flight Safety*, Australia Sept - Oct 2007, page 49.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Fire-and-Rescue-Workers-at-the-Crash-Scene>



Charred Remains of Pan Am Flight 1736

Image online, courtesy project-tenerife.com website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Charred-Remains-of-Pan-Am-Flight-1736->



Burning Planes in the Fog

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Burning-Planes-in-the-Fog>



Pan Am Passengers Escape from Burning Plane

Image online, courtesy airdisasters.com website.

View this asset at:

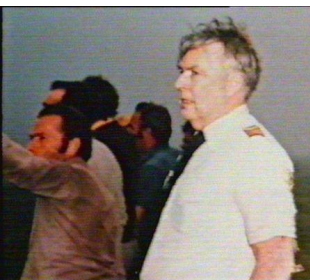
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Pan-Am-Passengers-Escape-from-Burning-Plane>



Plane Wreckage at Tenerife

Image online, courtesy project-tenerife.com website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Plane-Wreckage-at-Tenerife>



Captain Victor Grubbs at Crash Scene

Image online, courtesy project-tenerife.com.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Captain-Victor-Grubbs-at-Crash-Scene>



Pan Am 1736 (Victor Clipper) Burns at Tenerife

Image online, courtesy [Air Safety](#).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Pan-Am-1736-Victor-Clipper-Burns-at-Tenerife>



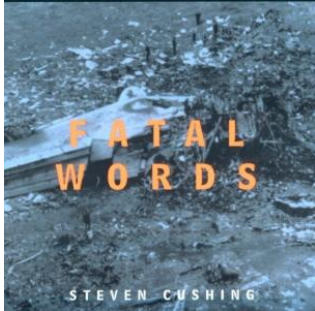
Pan Am Debris at Crash Scene

Image online, courtesy Pan Am Air website.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Pan-Am-Debris-at-Crash-Scene>

...at beacon, climb to 2000, maintain flight level three zero zero until
...after takeoff, proceed with heading three zero zero until intercept
...three two five radial from Cas Pabon. WOR (1706:08:09)
...09:61 KLM 4805: "Ah...roger sir, we are cleared to the P
...beacon. (flight level three zero zero) intercepting the three two
...way at takeoff." (17:06:23:61)
...tower. "Pan Am 1736, cleared for takeoff. I will call you
...
...Your message starts at 1706:19:39 and ends at 1706:22:0
...We were still taxiing down the runway the Clipper a
...at 1706:23:61.]

Communication Clashes and Aircraft Crashes



The Last Communication from KLM 4805: The Captain's Scream

Fatal Words: Communication Clashes and Aircraft Crashes, by Steven Cushing.

Book cover image, courtesy Amazon.com.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-Last-Communication-from-KLM-4805-The-Captain-s-Scream>



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