

On the 21st of December, 1988, Pan Am Flight 103 left Heathrow (in London) headed for New York City. On board were people from twenty-one different countries.

At 7:03 p.m. (local time), air traffic controllers noticed that the plane (then traveling at 31,000 feet) was suddenly off their radar screens. At about that same time, people in Lockerbie, Scotland heard a tremendous explosion and saw what appeared to be "liquid fire" falling from the sky.

Unknown at the time, the plane had a bomb on board which detonated less than forty minutes into the flight. Pieces of the destroyed plane created a debris field miles wide, but the worst ground damage occurred in Lockerbie.

The FBI tells us how investigators determined there had been a bomb on board the plane:

Ultimately, forensic specialists from the FBI, the CIA, and elsewhere determined that one of the fragments found on the ground, no bigger than a thumbnail, came from the circuit board of a radio/cassette player. That tiny piece of evidence helped establish that the bomb had been placed inside that radio and tape deck in a piece of luggage. Another small fragment, found embedded in a piece of shirt, helped identify the type of timer.

As parts of the jumbo jet, and its contents, fell on the town, witnesses saw what happened. A police officer later remarked that at least the tragedy took place at night:

Had this horrible event happened during daylight hours, I would think ninety percent of the population of Lockerbie would have been in a mental institution.

This video clip, about the loss of Flight 103 over Lockerbie, features interviews with people from the Scottish town.

Twenty-five years after the Lockerbie bombing, families of the victims held a service of remembrance in London, at Westminster Abbey.

A moment of silence ended when a single piper played an old Scottish lament called "Flowers of the Forest."

Then - at three minutes after seven PM, London time - the precise moment when Pan Am Flight 103 exploded - the names of all 270 victims were read. In addition, candles were lit in their memory.

Rev John Mosey, whose 19-year-old daughter Helga was killed in the disaster, delivered the sermon during the memorial service.

His main theme was this: "Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by doing good."

Doing good, however, does not mean to stop asking questions or searching for the facts about what really happened that December day in 1988.

To that end, the governments of the UK, the US and Libya issued a joint statement on December 21, 2013. That statement includes these words:

On the 25th anniversary of the bombing of Pan American flight 103 over Lockerbie on 21 December 1988, the governments of Libya, the United Kingdom and United States of America reiterate their deepest condolences to the families of the victims of this terrible crime.

We want all those responsible for this most brutal act of terrorism brought to justice, and to understand why it was committed.

We are committed to co-operate fully in order to reveal the full facts of the case.

We will all provide full support to the investigation team to enable them to complete their inquiries successfully.

We are striving to further deepen our co-operation and welcome the visit by UK and US investigators to Libya in the near future to discuss all aspects of that co-operation, including sharing of information and documents and access to witnesses.

Meanwhile, in the Scottish town of Lockerbie, Rev John MacLeod led a memorial service where people on the ground had also experienced the tragedy. He told the gathered crowd:

It is 25 years after the day on which certain men chose to set aside their humanity and destroy the lives of 270 people in the air over this area of Scotland and here in the little town of Lockerbie - not only their lives but also those who survived, families and friends.

What we the people of Lockerbie in this area will never tire of saying is we welcome you once again to this place where you know you are always welcome.

In doing so we seek to comfort and console you.

Thirty-five students, from Syracuse University (in the State of New York), died when the Pan Am plane exploded. They were among the 189 Americans who perished.

All 243 passengers and 16 crew members died with 11 additional people who were killed, in their homes, as the wreckage descended on Lockerbie.

The Winter Solstice of 1988 - the shortest night of that year - became the longest night in Lockerbie's history. To this day, questions of family members - about what really happened to their loved ones - have not been answered.

See, also:

Lockerbie Disaster - Loss of Pan Am 103, Part 2

Credits:

Clip about the tragedy of Pan Am 103 is from the documentary, "It Happened in ... Lockerbie." Online, courtesy Al Jazeera English Channel at YouTube.

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Lockerbie-Disaster-Loss-of-Pan-Am-1031>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Lockerbie-Disaster-Loss-of-Pan-Am-1031>