

# SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

## Murder by flight?

What the Government doesn't want you to know about the death of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown Part 1

By Shawn Torry

On April 3, 1996 a military plane carrying then Commerce Secretary, Ron Brown and a delegation of American corporate and government leaders crashed in Croatia. Thirty-four people on board died in the crash.

Initially widely reported and believed to have been just a terrible accident, in the days and months that followed, news reports hinting of a potential murder and government cover up began to surface.

### FUEL FOR CONSPIRACY THEORY

From the very beginning, government press releases and statements about the crash contradicted each other. Early reports said that the plane, a U.S. Air Force T-43, a military version of the Boeing 737 passenger jet, was three hours late for a scheduled landing in Dubrovnik from Tuzla in Northern Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Pentagon initially claimed to have had confirmed reports that the plane had crashed in the Adriatic Sea. Following those reports, rescue efforts became centered on the wa-

surface challenging the government's claim that the weather was largely responsible for the crash, the Air Force later admitted that "the weather was not a substantially significant contributing factor in this mishap." According to the official Air Force report on the crash — which is more than 17,000 pages bound in twenty-two volumes — three factors caused the crash.

The first factor was identified as a "paper work" foul-up, which had not alerted Air Force personnel that the Air Force had never certified the Dubrovnik airport and its approaches as safe. The second factor was that the approach to runway twelve, the runway on which Brown's plane was to land, had not been designed properly by the Croatians. The third and most important factor was "gross pilot error" which contributed to the crash.

It is important to note that the pilot of Brown's plane was an "Evaluator Pilot," for that type of air plane. He taught people how to fly the plane, and was the senior pilot on that kind of plane in the squadron. The pilot had logged more than 3,000 flight hours, and the co-

termine whether or not there had in fact been a malfunction of airport navigational systems at the time of the crash, because he "committed suicide" three days after the crash. He "shot himself in the chest." The New York Times reported that the 46 year old Junic was "despondent over a failed romance." Niko Junic's family disputed that report, also a recent medical examination listed his psychological state as being normal.

The Air Force report claimed that the pilot drifted some 10 miles off course. It is very hard to imagine air traffic controllers allowing a plane to drift that far off course without some kind of dialogue with the pilot. In fact, air traffic controllers begin alerting pilots if they begin to veer two miles off of the course heading. Therefore, many important questions about the crash could have easily been answered by simply reviewing the control tower tape of all conversations with Brown's plane, but the Dubrovnik airport's control tower tapes mysteriously disappeared. Not only did the tower tape disappear, but the back up cylinder, which keeps a back up copy off all tower traffic, was missing also. All of these "coincidences" are very strange to say the least.

Air Force policy requires that planes that transport government officials of diplomatic status or higher have a "Black Box". For some reason Brown's plane was not equipped with one. This was the same plane that had flown the first lady and daughter to Turkey only weeks earlier. Why this plane, on this flight, did not have a Black Box or some other voice recording device is simply not known. The Air Force could give no explanation.

In fact, the entire Air Force investigation itself was "unusual" from the start. It is Air Force policy to treat every military plane crash as suspicious throughout the investigation, which is conducted in a two part process.

The first process of the investigation, called the Safety Board, determines if the plane crash was a result of an accident, hostile fire, sabotage, mechanical failure, or some other cause. The Safety Board simply gathers all relevant information of a crash. The Board does not assign guilt; all testi-



Ron Brown is shown with President Clinton in 1992 when Brown was appointed the first Black U.S. Secretary of Commerce.

mony and evidence is private, and cannot be used in court.

The second phase of the investigation, the Accident/Legal investigation, does assign guilt. The purpose of this investigation is to find out what happened during and after the crash for legal proceedings.

Oddly, the Brown crash investigation skipped the Safety Board phase of the investigation, and immediately began and ended with the Accident/Legal Investigation phase.

### THE DEATH OF THE SOLE SURVIVOR

Many reports said that one person, a female, had survived the crash. That survivor was Air Force Sergeant Shelley Kelly, one of the two flight attendants who were seated in the rear of the plane. The rear of the plane was largely intact after the wreckage.

The first rescuers arrived on the scene of the accident approximately four hours after the crash, to find Kelly alive. Reports indicate that she helped herself into the rescue helicopter. After having survived alone more than four hours after the wreckage, and helping herself into the rescue helicopter, Sgt Kelly was dead on arrival when the helicopter landed at a near-by hospital. An autopsy at Dover Air Force Base later revealed that she died from a broken neck.

### THE HOLE IN RON BROWN'S HEAD

The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP), is an inter-service unit which investigates plane crashes. The AFIP dispatches a forensic pathologist to the scene of a crash to gather information and confer with pathologists at the Dover

Air Force Base headquarters to determine the cause and manner of death of each victim. Lieutenant Colonel Steve Cogswell, deputy medical examiner with the AFIP, was sent to investigate the Brown wreckage.

While Dr. Cogswell was investigating the crash site, Brown's body, along with the rest of the victims, arrived at Dover Air Force Base. The bodies arrived in transfer cases. Each case had been labeled. The label on the second case read "CR0-002-01. This number, when translated, meant "Croatia, second body off the truck." When the case was opened, a green body bag came into view. The bag was tagged "BTB Brown"- which meant "believed to be" Ron Brown. Exact confirmation was later made by FBI fingerprints.

Each body went through several stations. The first station was the FBI x-ray machine, which checks the bodies for explosives or explosive residue. The second station was the FBI fingerprinting station. The third station was the dental x-ray, and the final station was the full body x-ray.

The AFIP had the authority to, and did, perform autopsies on the bodies of all of the military victims. Dr. Cogswell said that autopsies help tell investigators how the plane crashed. The AFIP did not have authority to perform autopsies on the civilian victims, to include Ron Brown. They did, however, perform external examinations on each victim.

It was during the external examination of Ron Brown's body that the hole in his head was discovered. Air Force Colonel, Dr. William Gormley, an

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## "Wow! Look at that hole in Brown's head. It looks like a bullet hole."

ter. Later, reports began surface that the plane had in fact slammed into the side of a mountain.

The government's claim of terrible weather conditions has been widely disputed. What the Pentagon called the "Storm of the Decade" was, according to Aviation Week Magazine, actually nothing more than a light to moderate rain, with a constant fourteen miles per hour headwind at the time of the crash. Airport landing reports indicate that five aircraft managed to land safely just ahead of Brown's ill-fated flight. None of the planes reported having any landing problems. One plane that landed safely ahead of Brown's was a plane carrying U.S. ambassador Peter Galbraith and the Premier of Croatia, Zlatko Matesa. The pilot of that plane later said, "I was sure they would land."

As more reports began to

pilot had even more time flying the plane than the pilot did. Both pilots were experienced, and had unblemished safety records.

From the absolute beginning of the investigation, officials in Washington were reporting that the crash was an accident. Just one day after the crash, without the benefit of any in depth official investigation to validate his remarks, Secretary of Defense William Wilson, told the Associated Press that the Brown crash was a "Classic sort of accident that good instrumentation should have been able to prevent." The official Air Force report would later reveal that part of the pilot error was due to malfunctioning navigational guides and beacons from the Dubrovnik airport.

Air Force investigators were unable to confer with the Dubrovnik airport maintenance chief, Niko Junic, to de-