

Dutch organisation alleges cover-up of cause of '92 Faro air crash

THE Anthony Ruys Foundation, the Dutch organisation representing survivors and relatives of those who died in the Faro air crash just before Christmas three years ago, is continuing to fight for the truth, insisting that the real cause of the disaster has been covered up.

As the living victims of the crash gather today, Thursday, at a silent memorial service in Holland for the 56 who died and 106 seriously injured, they claim the circumstances and events leading up to the crash have never been properly explained or admitted.

Flight MP495, a Martinair DC-10 with 340 people on board, tipped onto one wing, broke up and caught fire on landing in bad weather. But for the prompt and efficient rescue work by the emergency services in the Algarve, the death toll would undoubtedly have been higher.

The aeronautical authorities

by LEN PORT

in Holland accept "a sudden and unexpected variation in wind direction and speed (windshear) in the final stage of the approach" as the prime cause of the crash. The Chairman of the Anthony Ruys Foundation, Dick Batenburg, told the APN this week: "We do not agree with this and are still fighting to have the truth made officially known."

While the turbulent weather was obviously a contributing factor, Mr. Batenburg is convinced that the main cause of the crash was pilot error. "It is the captain who is responsible for a safe flight. He has to do his job in such a way that he never gets into a situation in which an accident may occur," he declared.

Mr. Batenburg drew particular attention to certain pertinent points in the final report of the Portuguese Commission

of Inquiry.

According to the report, the captain of the plane, a very experienced aviator and an instructor for DC-10 pilots, should have been alert to the possibility of windshear or crosswinds given the meteorological reports at his disposal about conditions in the Faro area at the time.

He should have been alert to the windshear phenomenon even if neither the Faro control tower, nor the plane which landed just before flight MP495, did not mention it. But the crew of the ill-fated DC 10 did not adopt the recommended operational procedures to cope with windshear. They apparently ignored limitations imposed by crosswinds, according to the report.

In turbulent wind conditions, the landing distance needed is greater than normal. The report noted that if the

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information given to the approaching aircraft by the control tower had been interpreted properly, it should have been clear to those at the controls of the aircraft that the landing distance needed exceeded the length of runway available at Faro airport.

The report says in effect that, given the circumstances, the approach should have been abandoned. It also posed the

question: "One may wonder up to what point the captain was in some way psychologically motivated to conclude the flight as planned."

Both the captain and his co-pilot gave evidence to the Commission of Inquiry.

Said Mr. Batenburg this week: "The Anthony Ruys Foundation is trying to persuade the Dutch Aviation Safety Bureau that the real causes of the air crash are different from those the authorities earlier officially established."

Trying to convince the Dutch aviation authorities to rewrite their earlier pronouncements about the cause of the crash is not the only aim of the Foundation, which takes its name from that of the ill-fated aircraft.

It is concerned that there should be greater contingency plans in place in Holland to cope with a disaster such as that in Faro. On a more personal level, the Foundation has become a "pastoral hearing point" for the victims and their relatives. It also tries to give practical advice and support to victims with on-going difficulties.

Mr. Batenburg described the handling of compensation claims as "a disaster after the disaster." About 200 people have reached agreement over compensation, but 60 others are still in negotiation.

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