ARGO

On November 23, 1973, a Douglas C-47 crashed into an industrial park in Venice. The C-47 was a World War II transport, but this particular plane had a much more storied history. It flew for the Italian government, was sponsored by the CIA, and had been packed out with surveillance electronics.

The crash was initially put down to pilot error, but a second investigation concluded that the aircraft had been brought down deliberately, perhaps by a bomb. Yet the plane, nicknamed Argo 16, wasn’t an easy target for terrorists. Its movements and purpose were classified. The flight crews and personnel that looked after the aircraft were from specially chosen units. Smuggling a bomb onboard the aircraft would have been almost impossible.

Two groups have been implicated in the attack. The first is the Israeli security agency, Mossad. In late 1973, the Italian government was reported to have signed a pact with the Palestine Liberation Organization. In response for the Palestinians leaving Italy free from terrorist activity, the Italians would shuttle any captured PLO members back to Palestine. Argo 16 was the plane supposedly used for such missions, and Israel wanted to send a very strong message.

An alternate theory involves Operation Gladio, an operation sponsored by the CIA. The idea was to train a paramilitary group to provide resistance should the Soviet Union choose to invade Europe. Argo 16 was used to fly Gladio materials between locations. An attempt to disband the organization was made in 1973, but recruits resisted the idea. Claims were made that the Gladiatori bombed Argo 16 as a message to Italy’s government that they wouldn’t be shut down quietly.