'There has to be real evidence before the truth can be exposed' – Mrs Bartolo

continued from page 1

"He was, is and will remain my husband and I will not stop," Mrs Bartolo maintained. She said Carmelo (Capt. Bartolo) was an experienced pilot who worked hard to obtain his licence.

Capt. Bartolo also worked hard for his country and other pilots, even foreigners, used to praise him all the time, she stressed.

The board of inquiry was set up a day after the Piper Lance disappeared over the waters between Tunisia and Malta. In a hard-hitting report, the board, which consisted of commissioner Philip Sciberras and included captain Franz Sturmeier and engineer Louis Giordmaina, put the blame of the accident squarely on Capt. Bartolo's shoulders.

In their conclusions, the board said the accident could be attributed to lack of aircraft air-worthiness, adverse weather conditions and pilot fatigue, anxiety and stress.

The board said the three conditions fell under the control of the commander "with whom rests the responsibility and final decision."

The board, which held a total of 18 sittings in Malta and Tunisia, said it believed the pilot was negligent in undertaking a night flight in an aircraft which was not air-worthy.

Capt. Bartolo, 47, from Zebbug, was considered an experienced pilot who had 1,686 flying hours under his belt until April 1995. His medical certificate was described as first class.

On the night of the accident, his passengers were 43-year-old Philip Farrugia, Matthew Aquilina, 22, British national Michael Williams, Tadeus Gorny, a Polish national, and Irishman Desmond Boomer.

The board said from evidence collected from the wreckage, it transpired that the plane hit the sea at approximately 35 degrees down. The broken rudder pedal was compatible with a left wing down attitude on impact, the board said.

But speaking to *The Malta Independent*, Mrs Bartolo said it was not possible to determine what happened on the fatal night.

"I do not know how they came up with this conclusion," she said.

Mrs Bartolo said there had to be real evidence brought before the board so the truth could be exposed.

A number of questions surrounding the issue were brought up by Mrs Bartolo. She questioned the health and fatigue claims saying Capt. Bartolo's medical was excellent. Furthermore, on the night before the flight, her husband had a full night's rest and had not woken up before 8am.

"How could they know he was tired. On the morning on Saturday, he had slept till 8am so it is not possible for the report to be correct," she said.

Mrs Bartolo also questioned whether all the passengers were actually on board the plane or whether the plane actually left Djerba.

Another issue raised was the alleged conversation between Capt. Bartolo and the Control Tower. Mrs Bartolo said the voice on the recording on the out-going flight was completely different from the voice on the in-coming flight.

She reiterated that she could not understand how the board of inquiry came up with their conclusions but vowed not to stop in her quest to find out exactly what happened on 3 December 1995.

Meanwhile, well-informed sources said the board's conclusions brought about more queries on the circumstances surrounding the accident. The sources said the result was based on presumption of events which could not be ascertained for a fact.

"For the board to come to the conclusion that the pilot was to blame because he flew out in those weather conditions was not fair. We are very critical of the conclusions," the sources said.

The board had to establish exactly what happened and this was not done, it could only raise possibilities, the sources continued.

There is no tangible evidence of the events as stated by the board, the sources said, adding that there was not enough evidence to come to that conclusion.

Meanwhile, legal sources said the board's conclusion was not binding but it had to be respected. There was also the possibility of an appeal but this was not common procedure.

The opinion however can be changed at any time in the future if more evidence comes to light and the inquiry is re-opened, the legal sources said.

The sources said the civil cases filed by the families of the passengers for financial compensation will see the result of the board of inquiry in their favour. The cases had been suspending pending the outcome of the inquiry results, the legal sources added.