

Times of Malta
18/1/2000

The Piper Lance stories

I refer to the article about the disappearance of the Piper Lance four years ago, in which my son Matthew was a passenger.

In general I appreciate the genuine interest of your staff reporter. In fact I am grateful to you and to him for bringing the matter to the public's attention.

Indeed, as reported, I too feel rather uncomfortable and unhappy about the delay in finalising the inquiry.

However, my public statements so far have been limited to a letter of thanks published in *The Sunday Times*, addressed to all those who in any way assisted in the air and sea rescue operation and to a very flat categorical statement of personal belief "that the accident was a genuine general aviation accident" in answer to a request for a position, asked of me by Mr Lou Bondi in his first live programme on the subject in the TV series *Pjazza 3*.

I have never made any public statement regarding some of the details attributed to me in the article in question. Some I have not even said in private.

I am very disturbed, indeed very angry, at the public position assumed by lawyer Malcolm Pace, in your article. At the appropriate time and place, after the inquiry report is made public, I will answer Dr Pace in no uncertain terms on all of his "17 reasons", on his hypothesis of interception, hijacking and forced landings, and his 12 reasons for considering the possibility that the aircraft was sabotaged and

exploded in mid-air.

In the meantime I will only remark that all these "reasons" coincidentally but remarkably are potentially very much in the business interest of the deceased pilot's estate. Incidentally, the inquiry could not start and many precious months were lost due to the fact that Dr Pace's clients had instituted action in court to challenge the validity of the nominations of the members of the commission. Now I read of a last-minute report.

Obviously this may yet further delay the publication of the inquiry findings.

For the moment I await in silence, but with anxiety, the publication of the inquiry commission's report.

I take the opportunity to express amazement at Dr Pace's blatant indiscretion in this case.

I expect Dr Pace to be well aware of the very valid principle that while a matter is still *sub judice*, one ought to refrain from making such public statements.

I have been taught that this principle seeks to establish a measure of decency with which an investigative procedure is to proceed and acting contrary to this same principle could be tantamount to sheer disrespect towards the very process.

J. R. AQUILINA,
Balzan.