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# MIRACLE ON AF358



LEE THOMAS FOR NATIONAL POST

An Air France Airbus carrying 297 passengers and 12 crew from Paris overran a runway in Toronto yesterday, crashing into a wooded incline. No one was killed; 22 people were reported to have minor injuries.

## 309 SURVIVE AFTER FIRE ENGULFS CRASHED JET

BY SCOTT STINSON IN TORONTO

An Air France passenger jet slid off the end of a runway and crashed into a wooded gully after a hard landing at Toronto's international airport yesterday, but all 309 people on board are believed to have scrambled to safety as the airliner burst into flames.

Flight AF358, carrying 297 passengers and 12 crew on a direct flight from Paris, landed just after 4 p.m. yesterday in the midst of a driving thunderstorm and repeated lightning strikes in the area. The Airbus A340 overran the 2,700-metre runway by about 200 metres, barreling down a wooded incline before abruptly coming to rest near a creek bed.

Officials said the plane was evacuated immediately, but passengers said flames that sent thick black smoke billowing over

Canada's busiest highway broke out before everyone was off the airliner.

Johnny Abedrabbo, 32, said one thought went through his head as the plane crashed into a ravine: "I don't want to die today."

"We landed and everything seemed fine," Mr. Abedrabbo said. "Everybody started clapping and then we felt this shaking, and then we just took this nose-dive .... The left-side engine blew up very fast."

"We had a hell of a roller coast-

er going down the ravine," passenger Roel Bramar told CBC Newsworld. "All I could think of was 'Get off.'"

Some passengers fleeing the jetliner made their way to the side of the multi-lane Highway 401, where they asked passing motorists for help.

Steve Shaw, spokesman for the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, said 22 people were treated for minor injuries such as sprains and broken bones, but it was believed no one died in the fire. "We can confirm that the aircraft was cleared, as far as we can understand at this time," Mr. Shaw said last night.

Mr. Shaw would not comment on possible causes for the crash, or why the pilot attempted to land the plane during a heavy storm, saying officials from the Transportation Safety Board of Canada will conduct a full investigation.

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## 'We ran like crazy, there was fire everywhere'

BY HEATHER SOKOLOFF

It was brilliant and sunny at Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris when 297 passengers and 12 crew boarded an Air France jet bound for Toronto at 1:15 p.m. local time. Flight AF358, the only direct Paris-to-Toronto flight yesterday, was scheduled to touch down at Toronto's Pearson International Airport eight hours and 20 minutes later.

It should have been an easy trip for the Airbus A340, a four-engine jet capable of flying more than 7,000 nautical miles non-stop.

But the flight entered Toronto's hot humid skies a little behind schedule, beginning its descent around 3:50 p.m., in the middle of a heavy thunderstorm that had turned skies a depressing grey hours earlier.

There was nothing unusual about the summer storm except that the plane was pointed toward Pearson at almost the same moment as the storm's gustiest

point, the leading edge of a thunderclap, would have been smacking the length of the plane with 60 km/h winds, according to Environment Canada.

Earlier, Pearson declared a "red alert," a routine prohibition on ground crew activity when there is a danger of lightning and thunder. Aircraft can continue to take off and land as long as they do not require marshalling or unloading.

For the next 10 minutes, the plane descended through rough turbulence. Passengers looked out their windows and saw flashes of lightning from as far away as Niagara Falls. Fully 50 mm of rain fell yesterday afternoon, the heaviest and windiest moments occurring around the time the Air France A340 was pointed at Pearson's Runway 24 West, moments after 4 p.m.

At that point, the lights went out.

What happened next is not clear and will only be confirmed after an investigation.

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