

Flight 370: With search suspended, a cold-case file awaits

July 25 2016, by Ted Anthony



In this March 6, 2016, file photo, well wishes are written on a wall of hope during a remembrance event for the ill fated Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. With the Friday, July 22, 2016, announcement that the meticulous ocean search operations for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 would be suspended, the epic arc of one of this decade's most vexing unanswered questions is headed toward becoming, in effect, a cold case. (AP Photo/Joshua Paul, File)

For two years and more, it has been a lost ship, a metal container

carrying 239 souls that simply disappeared one late Asian night never to be seen again. And now, the search for the remains of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 likely will become a thing of memory, too.

With Friday's announcement that the meticulous ocean search for the missing jetliner will be suspended—in effect, called off—one of this decade's most tantalizing unanswered questions is headed toward becoming, in effect, a cold case.

"I am not surprised it's coming to an end without any answers," Tony Wong, a businessman in Kuala Lumpur, said Monday.

"People are slowly forgetting the incident," he said. "No one will ever know the truth."

The truth may be out there. The problem is, you have to know where to look. And that's been precisely the problem all along.

The Boeing 777-200ER vanished on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8, 2014. Investigators believed it turned back west and then south before dropping into the Indian Ocean west of Australia, where the search has been concentrated. The Malaysian government has concluded that it was deliberately steered off course. Conspiracy theories, unsurprisingly, still abound in the vacuum of facts: Was it blown up? Steered into the sea? Diverted to a remote airstrip somewhere? Abducted by aliens?



In this July 29, 2015, file photo, French police officers carry a piece of debris, the first trace of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, in Saint-Andre, Reunion Island. With the Friday, July 22, 2016, announcement that the meticulous ocean search operations for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 would be suspended, the epic arc of one of this decade's most vexing unanswered questions is headed toward becoming, in effect, a cold case. (AP Photo/Lucas Marie, File)

For a long stretch, it seemed the world's biggest loose end—a global obsession for weeks, a niggling unsolved riddle for years. And behind the epic tale were the lost souls and the families they left behind, which expected maximum effort and, to hear many relatives tell it over the long months, a successful resolution.

They were not happy at the news that the search was being suspended. To varying degrees, they have accused investigators and searchers and the governments overseeing them of disingenuousness, incompetence and nefarious political agendas.

In China, relatives have roundly denounced the decision. They still don't seem ready to think about the finality of it all.

"They are actually just playing with words," Hu Xiufang, the mother of a Flight 370 passenger, said Monday. "'Suspension' means termination to us. We strongly demand a re-investigation into how the plane went missing, and there is no excuse for the suspension of the search."



In this March 8, 2016 file photo, Jacquita Gomes, 54, wife of Patrick Gomes, inflight supervisor on the ill fated Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, receives a hug from a friend during a special prayer at a church in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. With the Friday, July 22, 2016, announcement that the meticulous ocean search operations for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 would be suspended, the epic arc of one of this decade's most vexing unanswered questions is headed toward becoming, in effect, a cold case. (AP Photo/Joshua Paul, File)

The decision to suspend the search, which has endured through damaged equipment and punishing weather, was made jointly by the three countries conducting the operation: Malaysia, Australia and China, which lost the most people in the aircraft's disappearance. Together, they already have spent \$135 million searching a 46,300-square-mile area.

The governments were delicate in their language Friday—they did not say outright that they were ending the search. But there is a general sense that it is unlikely to continue unless specific new evidence is found to suggest a particular location. And the search in its current incarnation will not end immediately; it could last into the winter months, officials have said.

Finding the plane would not just bring emotional closure to families. It also would hand investigators and the airline industry crucial information and tools to understand why Flight 370 might have gone down and how similar occurrences might be prevented.

A critical mass of actual wreckage beyond the few confirmed pieces that have turned up would also convey a sense of competence that we humans can go out and find our lost stuff in the depths of our oceans. Which in many ways, despite complex oceanographic models, we still can't.



In this July 22, 2016, file photo, from left to right; Australia's Minister for Infrastructure and Transport Darren Chester, Malaysia's Minister of Transport Liow Tiong Lai, and China's Minister of Transport Yang Chuantang speaks about Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in Putrajaya, Malaysia. With the Friday, July 22, 2016, announcement that the meticulous ocean search operations for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 would be suspended, the epic arc of one of this decade's most vexing unanswered questions is headed toward becoming, in effect, a cold case. (AP Photo/Vincent Thian, File)

"We can send spacecraft to Jupiter and Saturn and Mars to see their surface, but we can't send a craft to the bottom of the ocean to look at our own surface," Western Australia University oceanographer Charitha Pattiaratchi said.

The pressure on authorities, he said, suggests that a breather from the search might actually be the best approach.

"It's probably good to pause and then take stock of things," Pattiaratchi said. "They can try again if there's some better data or better technology."

In the meantime, the world goes on. The increased pace of the news cycle, the unremitting parade of minor violence and major cataclysm, pushes us away from this singular puzzle and into the more recent sad and lethal spectacles of Orlando and Nice, Dallas and Munich, Baghdad and Kabul.



This Feb. 28, 2015, file photo shows a suitcase belonging to Foong Wai Yueng, 40, a stewardess who was aboard Malaysian Airlines flight 370 when it disappeared last March, at her home in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Yueng's husband asked a friend to return the suitcase to him from the hotel where the Malaysia Airlines crew would stay in Beijing. With the Friday, July 22, 2016, announcement that the meticulous ocean search operations for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 would be suspended, the epic arc of one of this decade's most vexing unanswered questions is headed toward becoming, in effect, a cold case.

(AP Photo/Joshua Paul, File)

It is so much, sometimes, that we might fail to remember one fundamental point in the story that was, and is, Flight 370: The world we call home swallowed a giant airplane and the people aboard it and, 871 days later, we have absolutely no idea what became of them.

There is an expectation, fueled by a modern world filled with technology and accomplishment, that if we want something enough, if we throw enough money and resources at it, there's nothing we can't do. And when that narrative of expectation is interrupted by something as strange and terrible as the unresolved disappearance of a giant metal machine, it doesn't go down easy.

"It's all a big fabrication, a big cover-up," said Sakinab Shah, the eldest sister of senior pilot Capt. Zaharie Ahmad Shah. "Things just don't add up."

Then she said something that echoed many people's comments in the first days after the disappearance, when the modern world's best machines and algorithms were brought to bear to find that plane and there were high hopes it would be found.

"With modern-day technology," Shah said, "how can there be a mystery?"



In this April 4, 2014, file photo, Wing Commander Rob Shearer, captain of the Royal New Zealand Air Force P3 Orion, left, and Sgt. Sean Donaldson look out the cockpit windows during search operations for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight MH370 in the southern Indian Ocean, near the coast of Western Australia. With the Friday, July 22, 2016, announcement that the meticulous ocean search operations for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 would be suspended, the epic arc of one of this decade's most vexing unanswered questions is headed toward becoming, in effect, a cold case. (AP Photo/Nick Perry, File)

© 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Flight 370: With search suspended, a cold-case file awaits (2016, July 25) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-07-flight-cold-case-awaits.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.