



AIR FRANCE INFERNO: Coverage of the crash at Pearson, B3-7



LEE THOMAS PHOTO

Flames engulf the Air France plane that skidded off the runway at Pearson airport during a violent thunderstorm yesterday afternoon.

'I didn't even think. . . I just did it,' hero says



Guy Ledez leapt into action to save passengers from the fiery crash scene at Pearson airport

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An ordinary day at work turned into a harrowing experience for one Toronto man, who "didn't even think" before risking his own life to rescue babies and terrified passengers yesterday.

Guy Ledez, 37, was driving on Pearson airport property when he saw the Air France plane slide off the runway. Instinctively, he ran over to the badly damaged aircraft, which had crashed into a steep gully, and with another bystander, helped pull passengers from the fiery wreckage.

The two men then climbed into the burning plane to check for trapped passengers before escaping themselves. Ledez narrowly escaped an explosion that rocked the aircraft just before he jumped out.

"I didn't even think of what I was doing. I just did it," he said from a friend's house late last night.

Just before the crash, Ledez

had been driving a company vehicle on Convair Dr., which curves around the southwest corner of airport property where the plane skidded off the runway and crashed into the wooded gully. He works for a car rental company that regularly provides vehicles to the airport.

He had been driving parallel to the descending plane as it prepared to land, he said. "There was lightning in the sky. I'm pretty sure I saw lightning hit it."

Before he could think, the plane had plunged into the gully at the edge of airport property, just metres from Highway 401, which was packed with rush-hour traffic. "I just thought, 'Oh my God, oh my God, it's crashed!'"

Although cars in front of him on the road quickly turned around and headed in the opposite direction from the crash, Ledez stopped his own car, quickly snapped two pictures with his cellphone, then sprint-

ed over to help.

"It was a steep gully, about 10 feet (deep). It was very slippery and just pouring rain, practically hailing," he said. He quickly began to help passengers out of the wreckage.

"I was just pulling people up as fast as I could. . . I was handed at least three babies. There were lots of older people who practically needed to be lifted up," he said, his voice trembling slightly.

"There was just panic. Everyone was really, really shaken. Lots of people were crying. They were just trying to get away from the plane."

After 10 or 15 minutes had passed, the stream of passengers ended. Then, with the other man who had stopped to help, Ledez climbed up an emergency escape chute and into the burning plane. "We each took an aisle," he said. The two men did a sweep of the plane to ensure that nobody had been left behind.

Inside, it looked like "disaster had hit. It was really hard to see.



TORONTO STAR PHOTO

In this exclusive photograph taken by a passenger, people scramble to get off the Air France plane.

Stuff was everywhere. It was very smoky."

Satisfied the craft was empty, they headed to the front of the plane, where the exit didn't have an emergency chute. The first man jumped, but just as Ledez was about to, an explosion rocked the rear of the plane. He jumped at least five metres to the ground and just started running. "The only time I had a rational thought was when I was

in the plane and about to jump out. I thought, 'Oh my God, I could die.'"

Ledez was kept on a bus along with passengers from the plane for about two hours before being taken to the nearby Sheraton Hotel and later, a terminal building, for interviews and medical assessments.

He was taken to a police division to retrieve his car and returned home shortly after 10 ex-

hausted, hungry and sore. His back hurts from pulling people from the wreckage and he has some scrapes on his head from a barbed wire fence, but mostly he feels shaken.

He now realizes that if he had been driving on the road 15 or 20 seconds earlier, his car could have been caught in the plane's skid into the gully.

"I don't think I'll be able to get to sleep tonight," he said.

★ THE PLANE

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★ THE INVESTIGATION

Investigative team on hunt for jet's black box to explain why, how. B4

★ THE RESCUE

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