

Metal left by Continental jet may be cause of Concorde crash

PARIS (AP)—A stray length of metal that gashed a tire of a supersonic Concorde, leading to a fuel tank fire and dooming the flight, probably came from a Continental Airlines plane that took off on the same runway four minutes earlier, French investigators announced Monday.

The discovery after a dogged search appears to end one mystery in the investigation of the July 25 accident that killed all 109 people aboard the supersonic

plane and four on the ground.

Meanwhile, Air France Chief Executive Officer Pierre-Henri Gourgeon raised the possibility that the Concorde could be airborne again by May 2001. It was the first time any date has been given since France and Britain officially grounded their fleets in August.

"There are many uncertainties and May would seem to be the earliest possible date," he told reporters. "Experts haven't yet made their recommen-

dations," so costs to modify the aircraft are not known, he added.

French Transport Minister Jean-Claude Gayssot has said the plane will not be certified as airworthy until investigators can unlock the "catastrophic chain of events" that led to the crash.

Investigators were convinced early on that the metal part destroyed a left forward tire, sending huge chunks of high-velocity rubber toward the fuel tanks

in the Concorde's delta-shaped wings, causing a fuel leak and a huge fire.

The flight, filled with German tourists, crashed into a small hotel, less than two minutes after takeoff.

A Continental DC10 had a missing part "which appeared to be identical to the metal piece found on the runway" at Charles de Gaulle airport, said a statement issued by France's Accident and Inquiry Office, or BEA.

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