

THE WOLK LAW FIRM

ATTORNEYS AT LAW



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By **Blake Morrison**
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They arrived in a limousine, and Arthur Wolk greeted the gaggle of lawyers without leaving the chair at his dining room table. With a cast from armpits to pelvis and his right arm held by a sling, he needed help just to sit.

Not long before the meeting in november 1996, Wolk, an aviation lawyer and pilot, had broken his arm and back when a Grumman Panther warplane he was trying to land hit a fence and burst into flames. Because of his injuries, the lawyers, all of whom represented families of Flight 427 victims, had agreed to meet at his suburban Philadelphia home.

There, in a house whose aviation motif includes a hallway with runway markings and landing lights, the lawyers plotted strategy. Despite his injuries, Wolk had plenty more to offer than the cheese steaks he had ordered from Lee's Hoagie House. He had a theory - and a jet part - that he believed could help the families collect millions.

Wolk was convinced that a rudder malfunction had caused the crash of a 737 outside Colorado Springs in 1991. As part of his work on a lawsuit in that crash, he had bought a 737's power control unit, a 90-pound rudder part about the size of a car muffler.

"To really do this job, I had to buy it, understand it, fail it and find out what had happened," Wolk, 56, says today.

But getting the part through traditional channels had worried him. Boeing was a defendant in that suite, too, and Wolk feared that the company might discourage anyone from selling him the part. So he quietly spread word among a worldwide network of airplane parts scavengers who forage for equipment from scrapped or wrecked planes.

A month later, a call came, "We found one in Peru," Wolk recounts the caller saying, "and you want it because it's the only one in the world." In a few weeks, a box with the part arrived at his office.

Wolk still wasn't sure what the markup was on a part that cost him \$70,000. "It doesn't matter," he says. "Whatever the price, I was going to pay it."

As he told the lawyers gathered at his dining room table, he was confident that the expert he had hired in the Colorado Springs case would be able to show how part of the unit - the servo valve - jammed and brought down both 737's.

When the meeting ended, the lawyers believed they were a step closer to solidifying a case against Boeing and the part's manufacturer, Parker-Hannifin. "Once we started thinking about it, talking about it, we all became more convinced this was a viable theory that we had."



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