

'No doubt MH17 downed by Russian BUK missile'

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MH17 was downed by a ground-launched BUK missile, fired by a unit of the 53rd Russian Air Defense Brigade, a German investigative reporting organisation concluded.

Correct!v, in a report released yesterday, said the brigade unit, tasked with protecting Russian tank units, was operating in mid-July on Ukrainian territory without displaying national emblems.

Correct!v said Bellingcat investigators had concluded that a BUK launcher with the identification number 3*2 was photographed while traveling in June last year with a convoy from the western Russian city of Kursk to the Ukrainian border.

Later on July 17, 2014, the same BUK, now with its identification number 3*2 painted over, was photographed by Paris Match magazine photographer in eastern Ukraine.

A sergeant of the 53rd brigade, Ivan Krasnoproshin, who is particularly active online, had posted numerous pictures of his unit on his page on Vkontakte (vk.com), the Russian equivalent of Facebook.

Among his pictures is a photo of a document reporting his discharge from the Russian army in mid-June.

It was reported that many soldiers were required to sign discharge papers before being sent to fight in the Ukraine.

“There is little doubt: it was the 53rd Russian air defence brigade from Kursk that took position in Snizhne in eastern Ukraine on that fateful afternoon,” said Correct!v, a non-profit investigative journalism outfit.

‘Specialist operated equipment used’

Citing air combat experts, Correct!v also concluded that only specialists can operate the equipment.

“Russian missiles are only fired on the command of Russian officers,” said air combat expert Rupert Smid.

And although the BUK is outdated, it is a highly complex and deadly system. During the Soviet era, soldiers trained for five years, learning how to operate the guided missile system at the Institute for Missile Technology in Kiev.

Viktor Kusovkin, a comrade of Krasnoproshin, confirmed these statements. Kusovkin had served in the 53rd Russian air defense brigade in Kursk.

"You don't let conscripts fire; that doesn't work. You have to graduate from a military institute first," said Kusovkin. "That's a pretty difficult task. Only officers can do it."

Of the many experts asked on who could have fired the missile at the Malaysia Airlines plane, Correct!v said all agreed that the separatists did not have the know-how to fire a BUK missile.

"There is hardly any doubt: a Russian officer must have given the order to shoot down MH17," said Correct!v.

According to the Dutch air traffic authority OVV, which published an interim report on the MH17 tragedy last September, the airplane was hit by a large number of "objects with high energy".

These objects hit the airplane from above and the front at a high speed and with such a force that the rump broke apart in the air.

Military expert Rupert Smid, who was interviewed by Correct!v, said: "There is no doubt: flight MH17 was shot down by a missile. And this missile was fired from the ground and not from a fighter jet."

Smid said that a ground-to-air missile is programmed to explode just in front of and above the targeted airplane, hitting it with a cloud of deadly shrapnel.

Government accountability

Although the Russian military is primarily responsible, the Ukrainian airforce was also blamed for using civilian aircrafts as human shields in air attacks on Russian tanks.

Ukrainian fighter jets have the ability to hide just beneath passenger planes without the civilian passengers and crew even knowing their presence.

Anyone who targets a fighter jet from the ground risks shooting down a passenger aircraft.

"Without their knowledge, hundreds of passengers became human shields in the aerial war zone over eastern Ukraine."

Correct!v said European governments must also assume partial responsibility as they were afraid to label the conflict in eastern Ukraine a 'war' and did not prohibit airlines from flying over the war zone.

"The European Union should have recognised that Russian tanks and air defense units were active in Ukraine and ordered a no-fly zone.

"Politicians focused on negotiations with Russia rather than the security situation," it said.

Meanwhile, airlines were also responsible because they didn't see the threat, and thus endangered the lives of their passengers by flying over eastern Ukraine.

"For the airlines, diverting to longer alternative flight routes entails higher costs."

MH17 crashed on July 17 last year in Ukraine, with 298 people on board. The Boeing 777-200 was flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur.

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