

Painstaking reconstruction tells story of deadly missile strike on MH17
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The reconstruction of the wreckage of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 tells its own vivid story of the impact of the missile that destroyed the aircraft last July, killing all 298 people on board.

The crumpled wreckage, stretching from the nose to the business class cabin, clearly showed the puncture holes where shrapnel from a Buk warhead penetrated the cockpit, killing its three occupants instantly.

The reconstruction was the most intricate part of one of the most complex air crash investigations in history, involving the recovery of thousands of fragments of wreckage from across 50 sq km of a warzone in eastern Ukraine.

With fighting raging around the wreckage in the weeks after the July 2014 crash, authorities abandoned the standard practice of examining the wreckage as it lay on the ground.

Instead, they verified the wreckage using the many photographs documenting the crash site, and brought it by road, rail and air, to a hangar at the Dutch Gilze-Rijen airforce base where it now lies, assembled on a steel wire lattice.

"Only in rare cases (are) aeroplanes reconstructed after a crash," the report said. "Such a process is labour-intensive and time-consuming."

Pan Am flight 103, which crashed over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988, and flight TWA 800, which went down in the ocean near New York in 1996, were also reassembled – both also complex mysteries that took years to solve.

The crumpled metal shows holes punched in the cockpit by the Buk shrapnel, the tears where the cockpit was wrenched from the rest of the fuselage.

Items of wreckage are marked with police evidence tags. Even the shattered windshield was refitted.

First, an outline of the aeroplane was sketched on the floor of the hangar. Relevant wreckage was fitted within it, allowing a full size reconstruction using data from Boeing and a similar 777-200 scanned by police.

The trace left by the puncture holes as shrapnel passed through allowed investigators to conclude it had radiated out from a small point a metre from the left upper side of the cockpit – the point where the warhead detonated.

The sound of that detonation was recorded at infinitesimally different times on the four microphones in the cockpit, allowing investigators to triangulate the source of the

sound more precisely, offering further corroboration. – Reuters, October 13, 2015.

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