

MH17

The story
of the shooting down
of the Malaysian airliner



J.V. Koshiw

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*Dedicated
to the memory
of the 298 victims
of Flight MH17*

BOOKS BY J.V. KOSHIW

Abuse of Power, Corruption in the office of the president,
Artemia Press, 2013;

Gongadze, ubiystvo kotoroye izmenilo Ukrayinu, Izdatelstvo,
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Under the pseudonym of Viktor Haynes, JV Koshiw co-authored:

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Workers against the Gulag, Pluto Press, 1978 (with Olga Semyonova).

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Chapter 1

The crash

At 10:31 on July 17, 2014, Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 left Amsterdam's Schiphol airport for Kuala Lumpur with 298 people on board. Of the 283 passengers, two-thirds were Dutch nationals, followed by 43 Malaysians, 27 Australians and a host of other nationals (Table 1.1). Among them were eighty children.

*Table 1.1
MH17 victims by citizenship*

state	number
Australia	27
Belgium	4
Canada	1
Germany	4
Indonesia	12
Malaysia	(includes 15 crew) 43
Netherlands	193
New Zealand	1
Philippines	3
United Kingdom	10
TOTAL	298

Source: Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malaysia_Airlines_Flight_17. A passenger list is available at: Alison Vingiano, "Here is the Official Passenger Manifest for MH17," Buzz Feed News, July 19, 2014.

For MH17, this was just another daily flight along an internationally designated route. Four hours into the flight, as it was about to leave Ukraine's airspace for Russia's, the giant Boeing 777 imploded, showering passengers and aircraft parts across the countryside below.

Minutes before the destruction of MH17, the pilots had their last conversations with Ukrainian flight

controllers from the Dnipropetrovsk air traffic control station (DNP). At local time 16:08 in Ukraine (or 15:08

in Amsterdam), the pilot identified his aircraft as MH17 flying at 33,000 feet. DNP acknowledged the identification.

Minutes later, Russia's Rostov air traffic control station, RST, asked DNP for MH17's course to be changed to a new position because Rostov had three other commercial airliners to deal with at the time.

At 16:19:56, MH17 acknowledged the instruction to change course with the words:

*"ROMEO NOVEMBER DELTA, MALAYSIAN ONE
SEVEN" [or RND, MH17].*

These were the pilot's last words.

From 16:20:00, DNP made repeated attempts to reach MH17 as the pilots failed to respond. DNP asked Rostov air traffic control if it could see MH17 on its radar. Rostov answered: "No. It seems that it, the target, started falling apart." Rostov air traffic control had witnessed the breakup of MH17.¹

According to its black boxes, MH17 had no mechanical or pilot problems. The boxes stopped functioning, presumably when the Boeing disintegrated, at 16:20 local time (15:20 Dutch time) at the geographical coordinates 48.135, 38.503 at an altitude of 33,000 feet, not far from the villages of Petropavlivka and Rozsypne, about 75 km north-east of the city of Donetsk.

MH17 fell on the territory controlled by the pro-Russia Donetsk militia (Map 1.1), with the district capitals, Donetsk and Luhansk, being their strongholds.

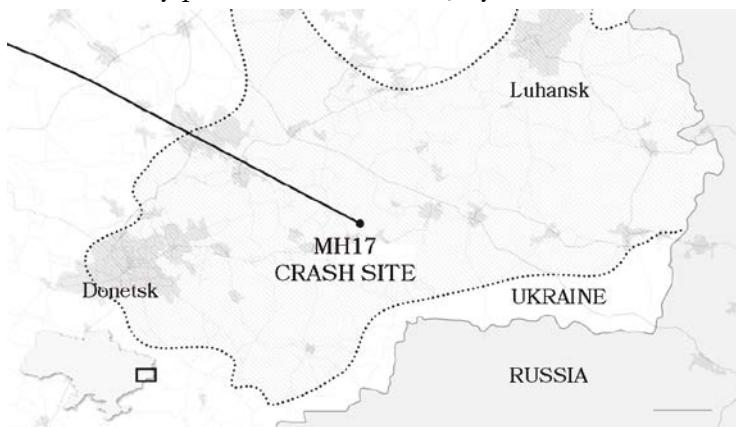
The cause of the crash, according to the Dutch Safety Board, the agency in charge of the investigation, was that the cockpit and front fuselage was hit by "a large number of high-energy objects":

"The pattern of damage observed in the forward fuselage

and cockpit section of the aircraft was consistent with the damage that be expected from a large number of high-energy objects that penetrated the aircraft from outside.”

Source: “Preliminary Report, Crash involving Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777-2000 flight MH17, Hrabove, Ukraine 17 July 2014,” Dutch Safety Board, September 2014, <https://b3923acad0ceprem-rapport-mh-17-en-interactief.pdf>.

Map 1.1 – Ukrainian territory controlled by pro-Russia militias on July 17, 2014



Large pieces of the Boeing 777, like the cockpit and forward section, and the center section with its wings and jet engines, along with hundreds of bodies, some still strapped in their seats, and thousands of smaller pieces, including hand luggage and suitcases, fell along a crescent-shaped corridor from where MH17 imploded, above the villages of Petropavlivka and Rozsypne, east to the village of Hrabove, a distance of about 10 km.

The cockpit and front passenger section split away from the main body of the aircraft, and fell almost straight down, landing near Petropavlivka and Rozsypne. The panel below the captain's window fell near Petropavlivka.

Map 1.2 shows the “Last FDR point” (the last position of the Flight Data Recorder) where the black box stopped functioning, and where the Boeing imploded.

Map 1.2 – MH17 wreckage fallout



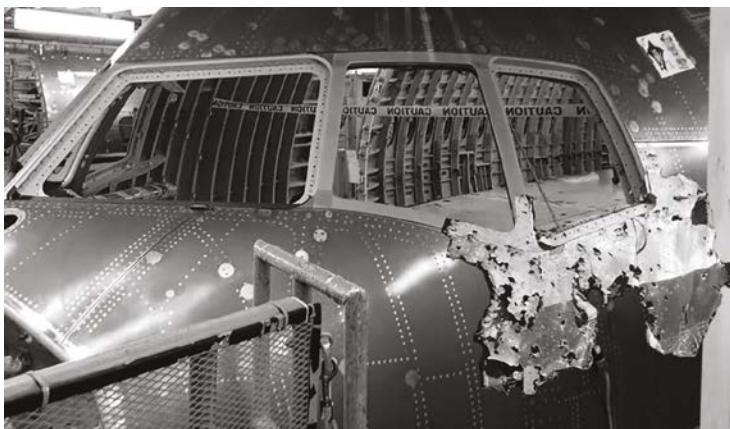
Source: “Preliminary Report, Crash involving Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777-2000 flight MH17, Hrabove, Ukraine 17 July 2014,” Dutch Safety Board, September 2014.

In their first report dated September 2014, the Dutch accident board didn’t identify the “objects” that hit the cockpit. It will be shown that the cause of the incident were not “objects”, but steel fragments that had bombarded the cockpit.

The pilots, pierced by fragments, died instantly. Most of the passengers died from the sudden decompression caused by the fragments piercing the fuselage and making the plane implode.

Analysis concluded that the fragments came from a warhead exploding about 15 meters in front of the cockpit and just to the left (port side) and above it.² Photo 1.1 illustrates the heavily damaged panel below the port side cockpit window. In comparison, the starboard cockpit side was not hit by the “objects” (Photo 1.2).

Photo 1.1 – Port cockpit window or “the captain’s window”



Source: <http://www.pprune.org/archive/index.php/t-543733-p-6.html>.

Photo 1.2 – Starboard cockpit windows



Most of the cockpit and lower nose fell at the edge of Rozsypne, as did other parts of the front section. The center section with its wings and jet engines glided some ten kilometers away from Rozsypne, and crashed on the edge of the village of Hrabove. This was the furthest away from where

the aircraft had broken up.

Photo 1.3 – Smoke from main wreckage site



Source: Photograph by Khuevyi Torez@Wowihay and found in Sergei Parkhomenko, “Sled and Torezom,” Meduza, March 17, 2015, <https://meduza.io/feature/2015/03/17/sled-nad-torezom>. Note, this picture was taken at 16:30, ten minutes following the implosion of MH17.

On crash landing the fuel tanks inside its wings exploded. The high temperature of the ensuing fire incinerated the center section, as well as the wings, the jet engines, the landing gear, and all the bodies inside.

A fifty-four second video clip recorded a great ball of fire from the explosion.³ A two minute video showed local residents reacting to the fire taking place on the edge of their village.⁴

Photo 1.3 shows the smoke from the fuel explosion at Hrabove, ten minutes later. Luckily for the people of Hrabove, the explosion and subsequent fire just missed them. Photo 1.4 provides a satellite view of the wreckage at

Hrabove, while Photo 1.5 shows what the wreckage looked like on the ground next to the village.

Photo 1.4 – Satellite view of main wreckage site



Source: "MH17 Crash site in Hrabove, Ukraine," Globe/Google, July 21, 2004,
<https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BxEeOqcjSE5uUnFCLS1tWWJjX1k/edit>.

The day after the explosion at Hrabove, the OSCE spokesperson, Michael Bočurkiw, described the apocalyptic scene:

"Our first observations were of a gruesome scene of bodies (some still strapped into their seats), personal belongings and a bewildered group of swaggering rebels, uniformed first responders and foreign journalists. There was no sign

of perimeter security. Aside from the vertical tail, the Aft [the aircraft's back tail] section of the fuselage was among the largest, intact pieces of debris.

Photo 1.5 – Main wreckage site



Source: NBAI. Photo: MH17 wreckage looking towards Hrabove: no. 1 jet engine; no. 2 wing's inspection hatches, no. 3 landing gear.

On the opposite side of a farm road that bisected the main impact site were scenes that are more terrible: mangled corpses amid still-smoldering fuselage, duty free shopping bags and open suitcases. Farther along the hellish landscape was where the wings, fuel tanks, landing gear and main cabin crashed.

The impact of the jet smashing into the ground caused a fireball in one field that brought temperatures as high as 1,600 degrees Celsius, according to some experts – enough to melt the aluminum wings of the 17-year-old aircraft and incinerate everything in the immediate area. Incredibly, the small village of Hrabove, just a few meters away, remained relatively untouched.”

Source: Michael Bociurkiw, “First responder: What I saw at Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 crash site,” CNN, September 9, 2014, http://edition.cnn.com/2014/08/21/opinion/ukraine-mh17_reflections/index.html?sr=sharebar_twitter.

Photo 1.6 - Main wreckage site



Source: OSCE/Evgeniy Maloletka. Note: the photo is of a MH17 burnt jet engine at the main wreckage site looking away from the village of Hrabove.

Endnotes

¹ “Preliminary Report, Crash involving Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777-2000 flight MH17, Hrabove, Ukraine 17 July 2014,” *Dutch Safety Board*, September 2014, <https://b3923acad0ceprem-rapport-mh-17-en-interactief.pdf>. Note, DNP is Ukraine’s Dnipropetrovsk air traffic control center and RST is Russia’s Rostov air traffic control station.

² “Limited damage to cockpit suggests missile exploded around 15 meters in front, left and just above cockpit,” *What happened to flight 17*, December 20, 2014, <http://www.whathappenedtoflightmh17.com/limited-damage-to-cockpit-suggests-missile-exploded-around-15-meters-in-front-left-and-just-above-cockpit>.

³ “07.17.2014, V raione s. Grabove Shakterskogo r-na sbit samolet,” *Pain-killeBOH*, July 17, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPu1dhje3Po>.

⁴ “Raw:Video Captures MH17 Crash Aftermath,” *AP*, November 16, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uK76aZ4vku0>.

Chapter 2

The cover-up

Photo 2.1 – Unidentified workmen cutting up the cockpit



Source: Photograph by Evgeniy Maloletka.

The wreckage at the crash site was evidence to be forensically examined, not destroyed. During the first day after the crash, the Donetsk militia removed the bodies of the pilots to conduct secret autopsies and allowed unidentified workmen to destroy the cockpit, the most critical piece of evidence, as it took most of the “objects” hitting MH17. No one seems to know who the workmen were. Despite their Ukraine emergency service uniforms, they were not working for Ukraine’s government.¹ Even the international monitors on the scene could not identify them, according to Michael Bociurkiw, the spokesperson for SMM (Special Monitoring

Mission of OSCE).² Photo 2.1 shows the workmen destroying the cockpit with a powerful petrol-powered circular saw. Journalists filmed the workmen placing some of the cut up pieces into a van.³

The Dutch Safety Board, internationally recognized as the organization responsible for investigating the MH17 crash, noted that some critical parts of the Boeing had been “deliberately” removed:

... the Dutch Safety Board did not find all the important wreckage at the crash site. Some pieces were removed. Some debris might have had a practical use for the villagers, but of some debris we believe have been removed deliberately.”

Source: “Dutch Safety Board chairman Joustra confirms MH17 was not hit by bullets,” *What happened to flight MH17?*, <http://www.whatappenedtoflightmh17.com/dutch-safety-board-chairman-joustra-confirms-mh17-was-not-hit-by-bullets/#comment-505>.

In addition to cutting up and removing evidence, the Donetsk militia attempted to appropriate MH17’s black boxes – the voice and data recorders – for the Russian government. This was against all international air crash procedures. Russia had no jurisdictional rights to the black boxes, or to carry out autopsies, or to remove evidence from the crash site. At this time Russia was not yet claiming ownership of eastern Ukraine.

MH17’s two black boxes were critical to the investigation, if only to rule out the aircraft and its pilots as the cause of the mid-air disaster. The two black boxes were actually orange. One was a flight data recorder (FDR) that records operational information such as the aircraft’s altitude, air-speed, engine power, and the pilots’ use of the controls. The

other, the cockpit voice recorder (CVR), recorded the pilots' communications and conversations.

As soon as the black boxes were found, the Donetsk militia was obliged to pass them on to the Dutch crash investigators or to Malaysian Airlines. Instead, they held on to them for four days before giving them to the Malaysian and Dutch representatives.

Photo 2.2 – The MH17 cockpit voice recorder (CVR)



Source: *Air Accident Branch of the United Kingdom (AAIB)*. On the left is MH17's cockpit voice recorder (CVR), identified by its smaller power supply unit. On the right is its flight data recorder (FDR) with its larger power supply.

The militia found the first recorder within hours of the crash on July 17.⁴ The second recorder was found the next day.⁵

The day after the crash, a commander of the Vostok Battalion of the Donetsk militia attempted to seize the recorders for Russia. The commander, Alexander Khodakovsky, told an emergency worker to get hold of the black boxes for him. In a telephone conversation with "Oleksi", an employee of Ukraine's ministry of emergency services in Donetsk, on July 18 at 17:53 local time, Khodakovsky told him to make sure that the international OSCE observers didn't get hold of them because "Moscow" wanted them.

[Khodakovsky] Your people are working at the crash scene?

[Oleksi] Yes, they are working Sasha.

[Khodakovsky] You are not there?

[Oleksi] Yes, I am here.

[Khodakovsky] Who has the black boxes?

[Oleksi] We don't have them.

[Khodakovsky] Who has, Oleksi?

[Oleksi] Now, let me figure it out. I'll try to find out.

[Khodakovsky] Do it quickly. Urgently. Moscow is asking where the boxes are. Please report to me where they are. We need to do it quickly.

[Oleksi] OK

[Khodakovsky] Who is there besides your [people]? Are Strelkov's guys there? [Strelkov is the pseudonym of Igor Girkin, the commander in chief of the Donetsk militia]

[Oleksi] I don't know. Just now OSCE people arrived.

[Khodakovsky] So, firstly, they are interested in the fate of the black boxes. They must be under our control. Please, do this task. OK?

[Oleksi] OK

Source: *Podrobnosti*, http://podrobnosti.ua/upload/news/2014/07/20/985573_4.mp4; and SBU, <http://www.sbu.gov.ua>.

On the next day, July 19, at 18:10, Khodakovsky again attempted to make sure that the OSCE monitors did not get hold of the black boxes, or any other evidence, because “our friends” in Moscow wanted them. He telephoned one of his militia subordinates, Andrei, with instructions:

[Khodakovsky] I have a request for you. It is not my request. Our friends from high above are very much interested in the fate of the black boxes. I mean people

from Moscow. There are two items. Khmuryi [Sergei Petrovsky, Strelkov's head of intelligence] has one. Please, cooperate with the Ministry of Emergency. Whatever you find must not come into somebody else's hands. Only yours, or Strelkov's people or Khmuryi's, it doesn't matter.

[Andrei] OK. Understood.

[Khodakovsky] Please, take the process under your control. And together with that guy from the Ministry of Emergency, Oleksiy, take everything that you find. Try to take everything that you find so that it doesn't get into somebody else's hands. All those people that are coming, OSCE and so on...

[Andrei] I got it. OK.

Source: YouTube, http://youtu.be/RDt_LgoUv_8.

Though the militia had gotten hold of the first black box just hours after the crash, and the second box the next day, the prime minister of the Donetsk People's Republic, Alexander Borodai, denied that the black boxes had been found. On the day after the crash, he said:

Our men are not experts in such issues. They do not even know what these black boxes look like. We hope that they did not disappear. But it was the evening, these are remote places; the territory is huge – about 10 kilometers, it was impossible to surround it quickly".

Source: "Borodai Briefing, 18 July, Q&A about the downing of Boeing MH17," *Donetsk Munitsypalnaya Gazeta*, July 18, 2014, mungaz.net.

Two days after the crash, Borodai continued to deny that the militia had found any of the black boxes.⁶ Only on the third day after the crash, July 20, did Borodai admit to having the black boxes.⁷ It took him more than a day, until

midnight of July 21, to hand them over to the Malaysian airline representatives. The internationally unrecognized prime minister created an all-day drama out of the hand-over, dragging out the negotiations in the hope of Malaysia recognizing his Donetsk People's Republic (DPR). After a telephone conversation with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, and under pressure of international opinion, including a UN resolution, Borodai finally handed over the black boxes. In a midnight handover ceremony, he took the opportunity to blame Ukraine for shooting down MH17.

Within a day, the black boxes were passed to the Air Accident Branch of the United Kingdom (AAIB), who on July 23 downloaded the data. On July 29, 2014, the Ukrainian government, without the other members of the newly formed Joint Investigation Team, announced its conclusion from the readings of the black boxes:

“Analysis of black box flight recorders from the airliner showed it was destroyed by shrapnel from a missile blast which caused a massive explosive decompression.”

Source: Gabriela Baczyńska and Aleksandar Vasovic, *Reuters*, July 29, 2014.

In contrast, the Dutch accident investigators, officially called the Dutch Safety Board, and the Dutch prosecutor's office, who were leading the criminal investigation, said nothing.⁹ Only on September 9, 2014, did the Dutch Safety Board, in its *Preliminary Report* comment on what caused the crash. It blamed not “shrapnel from a missile”, but instead “a large number of high-energy objects”. It failed to identify the “objects”, or where they came from, promising it would do so within a year of the crash..

As for the data on the recovered black boxes, the Dutch Safety Board concluded that neither the Boeing nor the

pilots were at fault. Its report said that the FDR data revealed that the MH17 suddenly stopped functioning at 13:20:05 UTC, or 16:20.05 Ukrainian time (East European Summer Time -EEST). It concluded that the cause of the destruction of MH17 was external.

Belatedly on March 30, 2015, the Dutch-led joint investigation team, composed of Ukraine, Holland, Malaysia, and Australia, issued a call for witnesses to come forward with information on the crew of the Russian Buk anti-aircraft weapon suspected of shooting down MH17.⁹ The joint team issued a statement that came closer to the statement issued by Ukraine in the previous July. It finally agreed with the view that a Russian Buk had shot down MH17, but with the caveat that this was only one of its lines of inquiry.

Clearing up the aircraft wreckage was a major task. The Donetsk militia, who destroyed the cockpit, continued to contaminate the crime scene. A *Vice News* video from July 18 captured militiamen and their helpers tossing some of the aircraft debris into a dump truck.¹⁰ Such scenes caused the Australian prime minister Tony Abbot to lash out at the Donetsk militia: “The site is being treated more like a garden cleanup than a forensic investigation, … The wreckage has been picked over, it’s been trashed, it’s been trampled.”¹¹

The militia was not only careless with the evidence, but also slow to clear up the debris from residential areas. Locals, like the residents of Petropavlivka, complained about the debris in their gardens:

“Villagers in … Petropavlivka idled the day waiting for someone to clear away the debris that had fallen in their houses and front yards. A 77-year-old woman with a small scattering of jagged brown teeth who called herself Baba Dusya recalled how her daughter had saved her

from a falling hunk of interior as she returned from milking her cow. ... Her son, who declined to give his name, worried about who would come to take the oxygen masks, tray tables, in-flight TV, and other debris from out front of their house. 'Whether it's the DNR [the pro-Russian Donetsk militia] or the [Ukrainian] National Guard, I don't even care,' he said."

Source: Max Seddon, "Bodies From Malaysia Airlines Crash Left in Train Station," *Buzz Feed News*, July 20, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/maxseddon/bodies-from-malaysian-airlines-crash-left-to-rot-in-deserted#.byq9jn62v5>.

During a break in the fighting, the Dutch Safety Board decided to remove the aircraft wreckage to Holland in order to forensically inspect the remains. In agreement with the warring sides, they removed the wreckage from the crash site starting on November 17, completing the task on December 10. Sixteen lorries in four convoys transported the wreckage across Europe to the Dutch Gilze-Rijen air force base.¹² This was carried out just in time, as soon after the removal the fighting flared up. The removal of the aircraft wreckage also provided the opportunity to search for the remaining missing bodies.

Endnotes

¹ Umberto Bacchi, "MH17 Evidence Tampering Fears: Cockpit Was 'Hacked Into', Says OSCE," *ibtimes*, July 22, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/mh17-evidence-tampering-fears-cockpit-was-hacked-into-says-osce-1457823>.

² "Spot report by Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) on visit to locations related to Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 crash," OSCE, July 21, 2014, <http://www.osce.org/node/121521>.

³ *Vice News*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lNXf_HncM20; *Aljazeera*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=4LRU3trvXiA.

⁴ Fergal Keane, “MH17 air crash Pro Russia rebel video of crash aftermath,” *BBC News*, July 20, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJ_U4iA2dJI. Note, hear the militia saying they found a black box at 1:58 of 3:05 minute of the video.

⁵ “MH17: rebel leader claims black boxes are under his control in Donetsk,” *Euronews*, July 18, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwQbiprT4fE>.

⁶ “Concern Grows Over Rebel Hold on Malaysia Airlines Crash Site in Ukraine,” *WJ*, July 19, 2014.

⁷ “MH17: rebel leader claims black boxes are under his control in Donetsk,” *Ibid.*

⁸ “Letter to the House of Representatives in response to questions about the MH17 air disaster,” *Ministry of Security and Justice*, October 27, 2014, <http://www.government.nl/ministries/venj/documents-and-publications/parliamentary-documents/2014/10/27/letter-to-the-house-of-representatives-in-response-to-questions-about-the-mh17-air-disaster.html>.

⁹ “Joint Investigation Team MH17 calls for witnesses transport & launch Buk,” *Politie*, March 30, 2015, www.JITMH17.cm, #MH17witness #snizhne #donetsk.

¹⁰ Simon Ostrovsky, “Exclusive *VICE News* Footage of MH17 Aftermath: Russian Roulette (Dispatch 60),” *Vice News*, July 18, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Px2rfWBW4wg>.

¹¹ Michael Safi and Josh Halliday, “Heavy clashes in Donetsk as forensic experts arrive at MH17 crash site,” *The Guardian*, July 21, 2014.

¹² “Last Convoy of Wreckage From Ukraine Air Crash Arrives at Dutch Air Base,” *De Telegraaf*, December 12, 2014, <http://www.telegraaf.nl/>.

Chapter 3

The bodies

Photo 3.1 – A body bag carried by emergency workers



Source July 20, 2015, OSCE/Evgeniy Maloletka

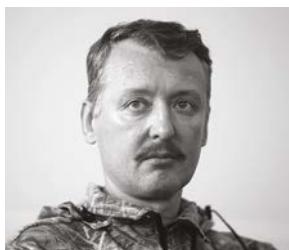
The implosion of MH17 at 33,000 feet hurled to earth 298 bodies along with tons of debris. All those on board died at the moment the Boeing disintegrated in the sky, some from the “objects” that showered the cockpit and the forward passenger section, and most from the sudden atmospheric change caused by the objects piercing the fuselage.

On the day after the crash, the pro-Russian militia whisked away thirty-seven bodies to Donetsk’s mortuary where unidentified doctors conducted autopsies.

The Donetsk militia commander-in-chief, Igor Girkin, aka Strelkov, revealed to a journalist information about the bodies that he presumably learned from the secret autopsies. He said they exhibited “bizarre aspects”, as if they had been

violently killed or had been dead for days:

“Many of the bodies are almost totally bloodless. The way they look, it is as though they had been dead for days”
... “The pilots, for example, were in a sea of blood in the cockpit, but other bodies were cold and white.”



Girkin

Source: Nicola Lombardozzi, “Girkin: ‘Kyiv is lying, it was them’,” *La Repubblica*, July 19, 2014, http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2014/07/19/news/girkin_kiev_mente_sono_stati_loro-91936346/.

Girkin’s comments provoked rumors that the bodies were from the missing Malaysian Flight 370 that had disappeared on March 8, 2014. In fact, those “almost totally bloodless” bodies were those who had died instantaneously from the sudden decompression and exposure to sub-zero temperatures. As for the pilots “in a sea of blood”, they were killed by “high velocity objects”. [Chapter 5 will present evidence that the “objects” were fragments from a missile’s warhead.]

A miner from Snizhne’s Zarya coal mine, who helped to recover the bodies, had a much better understanding of what happened to the bodies: “I think [the plane] got depressurized and they [passengers] got blown out and fell. Some bodies were naked. The clothes got torn off them”.¹

If the purpose of the secret autopsies was to remove warhead fragments, so that the type of missile could not be identified, they failed. Autopsies on the crash victims in Holland found metal fragments in some of the bodies: “Around 25 pieces of metal” were found in some of the bodies examined, according to Patricia Zorko of the Dutch national police.²

A spokesman for the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council accused the militia of carrying out illegal autopsies, “violating international standards of crash investigation and covering up a crime”.³

The pro-Russian Donetsk militiamen who rushed to the crash site, having been told by their commanders that an Ukrainian AN-26 military aircraft had been shot down, and expecting to search for the pilots, found instead hundreds of dead civilians in a sea of personal belongings and aircraft debris.

An intercepted telephone conversation presented the horror at the crash site. A Vostok Battalion militia officer nicknamed Grek was told by his subordinate, nicknamed Major, what he saw there:

[Grek] How are things going there?

[Major] Basically, we are 100 percent sure that it was a civilian aircraft.

[Grek] Are there many people?

[Major] Fuck! The debris fell straight into the gardens (of houses).

[Grek] What plane was it?

[Major] I haven't figured it out yet. I haven't got to the main wreckage. Now I'm near the scene where the first bodies fell. Here are remnants of internal brackets, chairs and bodies.

[Grek] Are there any kinds of weapons?

[Major] Nothing but civilian belongings, medicines, towels, toilet paper.

[Grek] Are there any documents?

[Major] Yes, a passport belonging to an Indonesian student from a University of Thompson [maybe Thompson Rivers University in British Columbia, Canada].

Source: "Grek and Major conversation in Russian," SBU, 17:32, July 17, 2014,
<http://youtu.be/V5E8kDo2n6g>, and with English sub-titles, <http://youtu.be/BbyZYgSXdyw>.



Kozitsyn

Similarly another militiaman, this time from the Don Cossack regiment, a paramilitary formation from the Russian region of Rostov, which had occupied a swathe of towns and villages in the neighboring Luhansk region,⁴ reported to his commander, the Ataman

[headman], Nicolai Ivanovich Kozitsyn that on the crash site: "there is a sea of bodies of women and children". The Cossack chief responded by accusing them of being spies:

[Cossack] About the plane shot down in the area of Snizhne-Torez. It's a passenger one. It fell in the district of Hrabove where there is a sea of bodies of women and children. Now the Cossacks are there and looking at all this. [Russian] television says it was a Ukrainian AN-26 transport plane. But the writing says "Malaysian Airlines". What was it doing over the territory of Ukraine?

[Kozitsyn] Well then, they were bringing in spies. They should fuck off. They shouldn't be fucking flying. A war is going on, goddammit.

[Cossack] Exactly

Source: "Conversation between Nikolai Kozitsyn, head of the Don Cossacks, and an unknown Cossack," SBU, July 17, 2014 at 17:42, <http://youtu.be/BbyZYgSXdyw>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5E8kDo2n6g> and with English sub-titles <http://youtu.be/BbyZYgSXdyw>.

Kozitsyn was ignorant of the fact that MH17, like many

other international commercial flights, flew over every day over the Donetsk region as well as his Rostov region in Russia.

Other militiamen also treated the civilians as spies. In one of the first videos of the crash site, a militia officer is heard instructing his men to find “intelligence” among the passengers’ personal belongings, especially computer memory sticks⁵ as well as passports.⁶ It is difficult to believe that anyone would look for state secrets among the personal belongings of civilians. Most likely, it was an excuse to pilfer valuables.

A militiaman from Donetsk’s Oplot Battalion, a former miner from Torez, complained that his fellow fighters showed too little compassion for the dead civilians. Their commander had first told them “We shot a Kiev plane”.⁷ After they found “the body of a little girl”, instead of Ukrainian pilots, they realized that a civilian plane had been shot down. He criticized his fellow fighters for not considering the possibility that the pro-Russian side had shot down the civilian airliner.

At the crash site, especially during the first two days after the event, the Donetsk militiamen behaved appallingly. They were aggressive toward the OSCE observers and journalists, whom they threatened to shoot and chased away from the crash site. With hindsight, their behavior was not surprising, as the militia was carting away bodies for secret autopsies and removing and destroying evidence.

On hearing of the crash, observers and journalists had rushed to the crash site from Kyiv and Donetsk. The day after the crash, the twenty-five-strong OSCE⁸ Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) led by Alexander Hug arrived, as did a posse of journalists. Heavily armed militiamen

led by an inebriated officer calling himself “Grumpy” (or Khmuryi, not to be confused with Petrovsky, the intelligence chief with the same nickname) confronted them. Holding a toy monkey, he blamed the Ukrainian government for the downing of MH17. The journalist Harriet Salem described Grumpy’s threats to international observers and journalists:



Grumpy

“On their first attempt to visit the scene of the crash officials from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE] were forced to beat a hasty retreat after a rebel gunman going by the name of ‘Commander Grumpy’ grabbed a children’s stuffed toy monkey and told press to show the world that the Ukrainian government is killing kids,’ before warning journalists and officials to ‘get away from here’ and firing a warning shot in the air.”

rebel gunman going by the name of ‘Commander Grumpy’ grabbed a children’s stuffed toy monkey and told press to show the world that the Ukrainian government is killing kids,’ before warning journalists and officials to ‘get away from here’ and firing a warning shot in the air.”

Source: Harriet Salem, “Up To 98 Bodies Could Still Be at MH17 ‘No Man’s Land’ Crash Site,” *Vice News*, July 23, 2014.

The OSCE spokesman, Bociurkiw, spoke bitterly about the behavior of the militiamen, as the regional militia commander had said the international monitors would have access to the crash site:

“A visibly intoxicated armed guard fired his rifle in the air when one of the observers walked out of the prescribed area,’ Mr Bociurkiw told journalists.

The 25 monitors withdrew after just over an hour, having been unable to set up an access corridor for specialist teams to investigate the crash, he added.”

Source: “MH17 plane crash: Ukraine rebels ‘limit investigation’,” *BBC*, July 19, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-28381460>.

OSCE also complained about the militia's inefficient recovery of the bodies: "*Several bodies had been marked but left exposed to the elements, Mr Bociurkiw said, and rescue workers were unable to indicate whose responsibility it would be to remove them*". The exposure would cause the bodies to decay unnecessarily, making it harder to identify them later. In the very hot summer, the bodies needed to be efficiently collected and refrigerated.

The militia had refused to accept a full-scale recovery from their arch-enemy, the Ukrainian government, which would have made the recovery more efficient. Instead the militia accepted limited help, about two hundred local employees from Ukraine's Ministry of Emergencies. It organized 800 other locals, mainly from neighboring coal mines and hospitals. As the bodies had fallen over a twenty or more square kilometer area, the numbers were insufficient for a quick recovery. More importantly, the militia had no refrigerated storage to prevent the bodies from decaying rapidly. One of the recovery personnel was asked: "Do you have any refrigerated tents? The worker just shakes his head".⁹

A BBC correspondent reported that the bodies were being placed in black plastic bags and left to rot in the hot sun for hours, while rescue workers were disorganized and did not know what to do.¹⁰

An AFP journalist reported that the "stench of death [was] almost unbearable" ... "After lying for hours under the summer sun some of the bodies are already becoming black and bloated".¹¹ He described the despondency felt by a nurse called Zhenya:

"Shortly after the [OSCE] monitors left, two buses carrying some 50 people pulled up to the scene. They are nurses from a local hospital and miners, dressed in their

work clothes and covered in soot, who have come to help. ‘This is the second time that I’ve come to help but I hate it here,’ says Zhenya. Already yesterday they picked us up at the mine but what horror – all these mutilated, rotting bodies.’”

Source: Marion Thabaut, “Rescuers Gather Dead at Ukraine Crash Site Under Rebel Watch”, *AFP*, July 19, 2014, 14:45.

Max Seddon of *BuzzFeed* wrote about the apathy of the recovery teams: “Local firemen and police officers, some of whom had clearly spent the night drinking moonshine, listlessly shoveled body parts into black garbage bags and left them to broil at the roadside.”¹²

In contrast to the reality at the crash site, the Donetsk



Borodai

Prime Minister Borodai presented an imaginary view designed for a Russian TV audience. Borodai said that the militia at the crash site was protecting the monitors and journalists, as the site was in a war zone. He claimed the evidence on the site was being safeguarded. He

didn’t mention that international observers and journalists were being chased away from the site by armed, drunken militiamen. Instead, he accused the international crash and forensic experts of refusing to come to the crash site.¹³ Journalists quoted Borodai as saying:

“There are stray dogs and foxes wandering around and there is also a possibility of shelling from the other side, which all may damage the integrity of the crash site. ... We aren’t in Africa, or the Antarctic. We are in the center of Europe, and I can’t understand why they [the crash and

forensic experts] can't drive four hours from Kiev. It looks like they want to drag their feet to make the investigation incomplete, impossible. Possibly it is sabotage."

Source: Paul Sonne, Margaret Coker and Alexander Kolyandr, "Concern Grows Over Rebel Hold on Malaysia Airlines Crash Site in Ukraine, *WSJ*, July 19, 2014.

At the crash site, in contrast, the militiamen told a journalist, it was Borodai who gave the orders to keep away the international observers and journalists:

"They said they had orders not to let them pass that came straight from the so-called prime minister of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, a Russian named Alexander Borodai. Though the men eventually relented and let the observers walk as far as the remains of one of the plane's two engines, they did not allow them onto the field where the wreckage lay."

Source: Max Seddon, *BuzzFeed*, July 19, 2014, at 6:30 p.m.

Not for the first time, Borodai took the opportunity of a press conference to accuse the Ukrainian military of being responsible for the downing of MH17. He said the militia didn't have the technical means to shoot down an aircraft at 10,000 meters. When asked by a journalist if it was possible that the Russian military had shot down the Boeing, Borodai ignored the question.¹⁴

By the evening of July 20, the recovery teams had transferred 205 bodies – 169 bodies from the crash site and the 37 bodies from the Donetsk morgue on which the secret autopsies had been performed, as well as a number of body fragments, to refrigerated railway cars parked in Torez, announced Alexander Hug the head of the OSCE

team, speaking at a press conference in Donetsk.¹⁵

Next day, July 21, the fourth day after the downing of the airline, the Donetsk militia allowed international experts unimpeded access to the crash site.

“At 13:20 hrs the SMM [the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine] arrived at the main crash site near the village of Hrabove to find it literally abandoned. For the first time in four days, it had unimpeded access. It noticed that all bodies [at Hrabove] had been recovered except for some smaller body parts. ‘The SMM did not see any perimeter security in place and was given unhindered access to the site. There was noticeably less activity and the Emergency Services were no longer present’.... ‘Two trucks loaded with 30 body bags and several smaller bags containing body parts left the site at 14:20 hrs’.”

Source: “Spot report by Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) on visit to locations related to Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 crash,” OSCE, July 21, 2014, <http://www.osce.org/node/121521>.

On July 21, as the four refrigerated train wagons were preparing to leave Torez for government-controlled Kharkiv, Dutch forensic specialists assessed the storage conditions for bodies on the train as “good”.¹⁶ This assessment didn’t refer to the condition of the bodies, but to the refrigeration in the trains. It was impossible to enter the carriages without special breathing equipment to count the bodies, as they were in an advanced state of decay.

A DPR [Donetsk People’s Republic] spokesman told OSCE “that they had thus far collected 282 bodies”. “In the circumstances of bodies being in four refrigerated train wagons, it was not possible to confirm the figure.”¹⁷ The DPR figure proved to be too high when the bodies were

counted in Kharkiv.

At 19:00 local time, the wagons with the bodies left Torez. The train took two more days to arrive in Kharkiv, on the afternoon of Tuesday, July 23, the sixth day after the crash. It was delayed because of fighting on the outskirts of the city of Donetsk.

The forensic experts found the remains of 200 bodies and not the 282 expected, according to Jan Tuinder, head of the international team of forensic experts.¹⁸ Soon, more bodies arrived in Kharkiv. By July 28, as many as 227 coffins had been airlifted to Holland. Two days later, Dutch and Australian experts retrieved twenty-five DNA tissue samples from the Donetsk morgue.

The search for the remaining bodies by Australian, Malaysian and Dutch teams continued, often interrupted by fighting. For example, on August 6, a team of 110 international experts and nine OSCE monitors, while searching near the village of Rozsypne, left the area after hearing gunfire nearby, and didn't return for weeks.¹⁹

On December 14, 2014, the Dutch minister of justice announced that only four bodies, all of Dutch nationality, had yet to be found and identified.²⁰ On February 2, 2015, the Dutch ministry of defense reported that one more body had been identified.²¹ It added that search teams were hoping to return to the crash site when the fighting stopped to find the remaining three.

The Dutch investigators announced on April 30, 2015 that they had ended the recovery of any more human remains and wreckage from MH17.

"Pieter-Jaap Adalberserg, head of the Dutch-led mission, said the team had done 'everything humanly possible' in the recovery process on Wednesday. He said many more

body parts had been discovered, and the team was hopeful the finds would allow the final two victims to be identified.”

Source: “MH17 disaster: Search for remains and wreckage ends,” BBC News, April 30, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-32534501>.

Endnotes

¹ Simon Ostrovsky, “Exclusive VICE News Footage of MH17 Aftermath: Russian Roulette (Dispatch 60),” *Vice News*, July 18, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Px2rfWBW4wg>.

² “Dutch Say Need To Know MH17 Missile Launch Site To Prosecute”, *AFP*, Rotterdam, September 12, 2014, 10:25.

³ Andriy Lysenko, “Press Conference,” *Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council*, July 19, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZIi2ynNb2uQ>.

⁴ “Kozitsyn and Lyosha intercepted telephone conversation,” *SBU*, May 29, 2014, http://youtu.be/KFedPYqS_JA. Note, Kozitsyn’s Don Cossacks first appeared in Ukraine on May 13, 2014, when they occupied a number of towns in Luhansk Oblast along the administrative border with the Donetsk Oblast. On May 29, 2014, Kozitsyn had ordered the kidnapping of four OSCE military monitors at in Severodonetsk, Luhansk region.

⁵ “BBC News - MH17 air crash Pro Russia rebel video of crash aftermath,” *BBC*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJ_U4iA2djI.

⁶ The Russian TV company Life News filmed a pile of passports: “Udalennoe Video ot *LifeNews* s mesta krusheniya malaiziiskogo ‘Boinga-777,’ *LifeNews*, July 17, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1XSvxCfIuo>.

⁷ Lorenzo Cremonesi, “Così è stato colpito l’aereo”, *Corriere della Sera*, July 22, 2014, http://www.corriere.it/esteri/14_luglio_22/cosi-stato-colpito-l-aereo-0a7e5f9e-115f-11e4-affb-3320a03d21e8.shtml.

⁸ Note, OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) consists of 57 European and North American member states, including Russia.

⁹ “Rescuers Gather Dead at Ukraine Crash Site Under Rebel Watch,” *AFP*, July 19, 2014, 14:45.

¹⁰ “MH17 plane crash: Ukraine rebels ‘limit investigation’,” *BBC*, July 19, 2014.

¹¹ “Gather Dead at Ukraine Crash Site Under Rebel Watch, Hrabove,” *AFP*, July 19, 2014, 14:45.

¹² Max Seddon, *BuzzFeed*, July 19, 2014, at 6:30 p.m.

¹³ “Alexander Borodai, briefing about the downed Boeing,” *Pravda TV*, July 19, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka14hxTIIxk>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Ukraine: OSCE mission confirms MH17 bodies in train at Torez,” *RuptlyTV*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0AzHUI1M-Y>.

¹⁶ “Spot report by Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) on visit to locations related to Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 crash,” *OSCE*, July 21, 2014, <http://www.osce.org/node/121521>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Harriet Salem, “Up To 98 Bodies Could Still Be at MH17 ‘No Man’s Land’ Crash Site,” *Vice News*, July 23, 2014.

¹⁹ “Ukraine: OSCE Watching brief on MH17 developments,” *OSCE*, August 6, 2014.

²⁰ “Dutch Identify All Foreign MH17 Crash Victims,” *AFP*, December 11, 2014.

²¹ “Dutch Team at MH17 Crash Site to Collect More Remains,” *AFP*, February 2, 2015; and “MH17: Dutch team recovers more human remains from downed Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17,” *AFP*, February 3, 2015.

Chapter 4

The launch site

Just three hours after the shooting down of MH17, a local from Torez tweeted a photograph with a vapor trail taken at 16:25:48, just five minutes after the missile struck MH17.¹ Photo 4.1 shows his picture with the vapor trail and a line of arrows indicating the vapor trail's source.

Seven seconds earlier he had taken his first photograph of the vapor trail. At 16:30:06 he snapped a third picture – black smoke on the horizon. The smoke turned out to be from MH17's fuel tanks exploding at Hrabove.²

Photo 4.1 – The vapor trail



Source: Daniel Romein, "Examining the MH17 Launch Smoke Photographs," *Bellingcat*, January 27, 2015, <https://www.bellingcat.com/resources/case-studies/2015/01/27/examining-the-mh17-launch-smoke-photographs/>.

On the same evening, the photographer also posted a map with his estimated location of the missile's launch site. He said it was based on his two pictures of the missile's vapor trail and the accounts of three eyewitnesses. His estimate placed the missile launch site south of Snizhne between the villages of Chervonyi Zhovten and Pervomaisky.³

That same evening, a journalist spoke to the photographer: *"The man identified himself as a Donetsk-born 40-year-old working in the coal industry. He wished to remain anonymous because, as he put it, speaking in Russian, 'the town is run by the terrorists, and I do not want to suffer'."*

Source: Elena Holodny, "Local Ukraine Residents Say They Saw Rebels With Missiles Suspected Of Taking Down Malaysia Plane," *Business Insider*, July 17, 2014, 3:18 pm EST, 11:18 EEST), <http://www.businessinsider.com/donetsk-resident-speaks-about-malaysia-airlines-crash-2014-7?IR=T>.

Months later, the same photographer from Torez told the Dutch *RTL* journalist Olaf Koens:

"At 16:20 we heard an explosion. The first explosion was not very heavy. 15 seconds later, something like that, there was a second explosion, which was louder and it made the windows shake."

Source: Olaf Koens interview translated into English appears in "MH17 Shot Down from Russian-held Area of Ukraine Suggest Eyewitness Photos," *Ukraine: War Log*, Dec. 22, 2014, <http://ukrainewarlog.blogspot.co.uk/>.

He told the Dutch journalist that he took three pictures within minutes of the first explosion: two of the vapor and one of the black smoke on the horizon. He also said that he had given his camera with the three pictures to Ukraine's state security agency (SBU), which gave them to the Dutch investigators.

The same photographer gave the Russian journalist Sergei Parkhomenko a more detailed interview.⁴

Four days later, on July 21, 2014, *Ukraine@war*, using the same pictures, published its estimated location of the missile launch site. It turned out to be similar to the estimate made by the Torez photographer, somewhere south of Snizhne between the villages of Chervonyi Zhovten and Pervomaisky.

Roland Oliphant of London's *The Telegraph* visited the area from where both the photographer and *Ukraine@war* estimated the missile to have been launched. A local farmer directed Oliphant to a charred field, which could have been created by the blowback of a Buk missile. Oliphant in his dispatch for the *The Telegraph* did not provide coordinates for the field.⁵

However, *Ukraine@war* pinpointed its location by carefully locating the terrain seen on the video of Oliphant reporting from the field.⁶

Experts confirmed that the charred field could have been the location of the missile launch. The Dutch TV news service, *RTL*, asked experts to evaluate the authenticity



Field with the coordinates 47.974926, 38.760661

of the three pictures by the Torez photographer, to comment on the vapor trails in the pictures, and to locate their source.

The expert on pictures, Eduard de Kam of Nederlands Instituut Digitale Fotografie (NIDF), concluded there was no indication of manipulation of the three pictures:

"The first two pictures were taken shortly after one another (less than 10 seconds), a few minutes after contact was

lost with the aircraft. That was at 15:20:03 Dutch time [16:20.03 Ukrainian time].

The first picture is a wide shot and in the second picture [Photo 4.1], the camera zooms in. On the third photograph one can see on the horizon a plume of black smoke rising from the ground that blows right and changes color to grey, and then as a plume of white smoke, goes straight up [Photo 1.3 in Chapter 1].

Source: “Hoe onderzocht RTL Nieuws de nieuwe MH17-foto’s?”, *RTL*, December 22, 2014, http://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/buitenland/nieuw-bewijs-mh17#node_1237916.

The rocket expert Theo Lampreys was asked what the three pictures showed:

[The first two] “This is very likely a trail of an anti-aircraft missile, or a smoke trail that leaves a rocket when it is launched.

The third picture, which was taken a few minutes later, around half past three Dutch time [16:30 Ukrainian time], shows a thick black smoke plume that corresponds in shape with other images taken shortly after the crash of the MH17 device.”

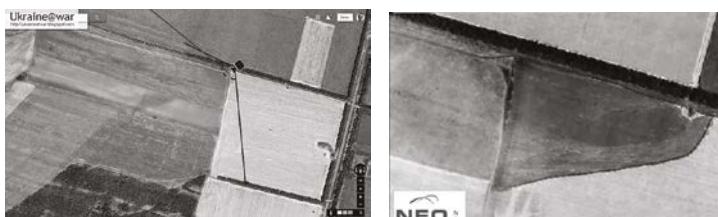
Source: *Ibid.*

The scientist Corné van der Sanden of the Netherlands Geomatics & Earth Observation (NEO) was asked to locate the origin of the vapor on the photographs. He located it to a recently plowed field. Using satellite imagery, he discovered a scorched area on a plowed field in the same location where Ukraine@war found Oliphant’s charred field (Map 4.1).

From all this excellent detective work, one can conclude

with a high degree of confidence that the missile that destroyed MH17 was fired from a field with the coordinates of 47.974926, 38.760661, located south of Snizhne, about equidistant between the villages of Pervomaisky and Chervonyi Zhovten. This was the same area that the Torez photographer identified as the launch site just hours after the shooting down of MH17.

Map 4.1 – The launch site -
the scorched area on a plowed field



Note, on the left is a satellite picture of the field where *Ukraine@war* pinpointed the location of the burnt field found by Roland Oliphant of London's *The Telegraph*. On the right is the same field located by Corne van der Sande, "ROOKPLUIM ANALYSE, NEO," *rtl*, December 22, 2014, http://www.rtlnieuws.nl/sites/default/files/content/documents/2014/12/22/Rapport_Rookpluim_analyse_v1.0.pdf. The field on Google maps is at <https://www.google.ru/maps/@47.972542,38.768413,1537m/data=!3m1!1e3>.

Witnesses living north of the missile launch site, in Oktjabr [October] district in the southern part of Snizhne, and west in the village of Chervonyi Zhovten, said they either heard or saw a missile at about 16:20 local time. A woman from Oktyabr told a reporter she heard and saw what looked like a missile flying from the south to the north of Snizhne.

She said in a Zello (a Wi-Fi) mobile phone group

conversation:

“... I was in the vegetable garden, at Oktyabr ... heard a roaring sound, where could this roar come from. Literally, it was all quiet, then immediately a strong roaring sound. I look up and something was flying ... well, I can't say what it was, but it was coming from Saurovki [further south of Snizhne]. I thought it was a missile. I ran into the house, called for my mom. We went down to the cellar, and afterwards heard some explosions. When it flew, it was with white smoke and a loud roaring sound when flying over Oktyabr as if towards the town, in that direction.”

A male voice added:

“Coal Mine No. 8 [located in the western area of Snizhne] confirms”.

Another male voice pitched in to say that there had been an explosion north of Snizhne:

“I was also standing on my balcony. Flying, smoke in the clouds, then black smoke, and then an explosion and something fell beyond Cheryomushky or further.”

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqSZu-HYWOA>, and “Tapped (pro) Russian conversations confirm MH17 missile launch,” *Ukraine@war*, July 26, 2014, <http://ukraineatwar.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/tapped-prorussian-conversations-cofirm.html>.

Four residents from the village of Chervonyi Zhovten, located south of Snizhne, and about two kilometers west of the “charred field”, recounted to a journalist what they saw and heard in the afternoon of July 17.

“It took off, at first we thought that a plane was crashing. But it was a rocket,” said Kovalenko, 45, who then saw what she thought was smoke coming from the ‘Progress’ mine in Torez, a town 9.5 km away to the north-west.

Her daughter Anastasia Kovalenko, 14, said she saw a rocket flying over the village, and then a plane in the distance blowing up.

Olga Krasilnikova, 30, also said she saw a rocket, some time between 4 and 5 p.m. “I saw it was flying, flew right over me. From that side,” she said, pointing to the outskirts of the village:

“I saw smoke in the sky, then I heard an explosion and I saw a huge blue (cloud of) smoke.”

The 58-year-old Pyotr Fedotov said:

“There was such a bang that we involuntarily sat down, in the yard, our legs gave way underneath us. Then we got curious and immediately went to the other side of the house to take a look ... The rocket was here, it wiggled around, then some kind of rocket stage separated, and then, somewhere toward Lutuhyne, Torez, I saw the plane fall apart in the air. It was only later that we found out it was a Boeing.”

Source: Anton Zverev, “Exclusive: From ‘Red October’ village, new evidence on downing of Malaysian plane over Ukraine”, *Reuters*, Chervonyi Zhovten, March 13, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/12/us-ukraine-crisis-airliner-idUSKBN0M81XF20150312>.

All who heard the loud bangs, either from the Zello telephone group conversation or the residents from Chervonyi Zhovten, said they came from south of Snizhne.

In the same time period, a photographer took two pictures showing a vapor trail coming from south of Snizhne. The local witnesses confirmed the excellent studies that traced the vapor trail to a “charred field”, south of Snizhne, between the villages of Pervomaisky and Chervonyi Zhovten.

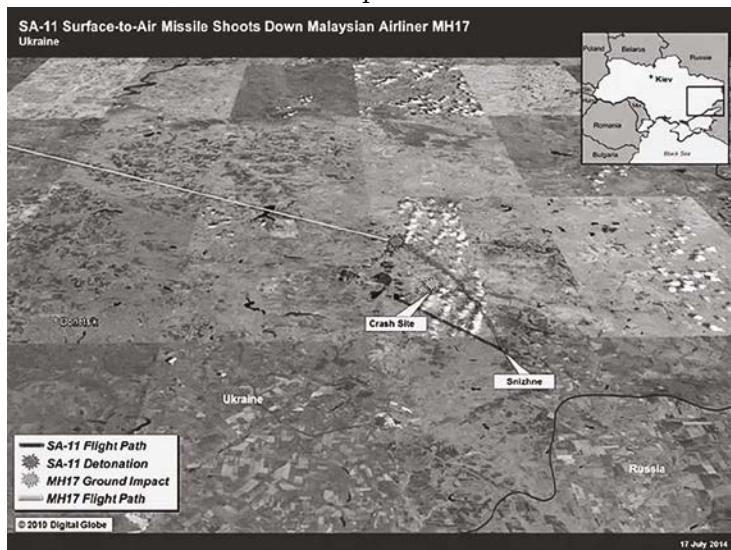
The location of the missile launch site was picked up by

U.S. spy satellites, either the Space-Based Infrared System (SBIRS), America's early warning missile defense system, or its older Cold War spy satellite system.⁷

At present, the U.S. administration has made available to the public only a poor quality satellite image (Map 4.2) with a caption saying that a missile was fired from near Snizhne.

From this poor quality image, it seems impossible to determine exactly where the missile was fired from. Presumably the U.S. Defense Department wants to hide its spying capabilities from Russia. Hopefully, the U.S. have provided the Dutch, who have taken the lead in the MH17 investigation, with a good quality image of the missile launch site.

Map 4.2



Source: U.S. State Department, "United States Assessment of the Downing of Flight MH17 and its Aftermath", U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, July 19, 2014, <http://ukraine.usembassy.gov/mobile//statements/asmt-07192014.html>.

However a sleuth has outwitted the U.S. government. Using the published low-resolution image, he determined that the U.S. satellite image approximately pointed to the area of the “charred field”.⁸ This is just another piece of evidence that the missile was fired from or near this field.

One study, by the *CORRECT!V* collective of journalists based in Germany, used the U.S. government image to identify a different field for the launch site, north of Snizhne, rather than south. However, this conclusion should be taken with a pinch of salt as the study provides no evidence to back up this claim.⁹

The last word on the launch site will be a soil test. No amount of plowing can mask the missile fuel left in the soil, according to Sergei Parkhomenko, the author of a detailed study on the location of the missile launch site. His study also points to a field south of Snizhne, not the “charred field”, but another one about 500 meters away.⁹ Hopefully, the official MH17 investigators have taken soil samples from the sites.¹⁰

Endnotes

¹ Khuevyi Torez@Wowihay, “svidetel skinul fotku momenta puska rakety. Na gorizonte kanatnaya doroga mezhdju Lutugina i Tsof #Torez granitsa #Snezhnoe,” 19:23, July 17, 2014, <https://twitter.com/wowihay/status/489807649509478400>.

² The first picture of the missile vapor can be found at <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-eie1C3-LWzw/U80YMKkLtiI/AAAAAAAATLw/RF35mQIrfJbw/s1600/MH17+4.jpg>. The second is another vapor missile photo: www.mediafire.com/download/nwbja2jy5ud36ey/Second+BUK+trail+photo.jpg. The third photo is of the smoke from the crash site at Hrabove: Photo 1.3

in Chapter 1. All three photographs are in the video: <http://nos.nl/video/2010323-later-begreep-ik-pas-wat-het-precies-was.html>.

³ <https://twitter.com/WowihaY/status/489914266439671808/photo/1>

⁴ Sergei Parkhomenko, “Sled nad Torezom,” *Meduza*, March 17, 2015, <https://meduza.io/feature/2015/03/17/sled-nad-torezom>.

⁵ Roland Oliphant, “MH17: the clues which may lead to missile launch site,” *The Telegraph*, July 22, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10984530/MH17-the-clues-which-may-lead-to-missile-launch-site.html>. A picture of the charred field appeared in “Where was the rocket launcher that downed #MH17? Clues on the ground”, *The Telegraph@Telegraph*, July 22, 2014, <http://fw.to/CF8LsiY>. .

⁶ P. Martin, “EXACT location pinpointed of MH17 missile launch site,” *Ukraine@war*, July 23, 2014, <http://ukraineatwar.blogspot.co.uk/2014/07/exact-location-pinpointed-of-mh17.html>.

⁷ R.G. Kennedy, III, “Seeing a SAM from GEO?,” *[FPSPACE] MH17 and space*, July 24, 2014, <http://www.friends-partners.org/pipermail/fpspace/2014-July/035005.html>.

⁸ Daniel Romein, “Is this the Launch Site of the Missile that shot down Flight MH17? A look at the claims and evidence,” *Bellingcat*, January 27, 2015, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2015/01/27/is-this-the-launch-site-of-the-missile-that-shot-down-flight-mh17/#comment-12493>.

⁹ Marcus Bensmann and David Crawford, “Flight MH17, Searching for the Truth,” *CORRECTIV*, January 2015, <https://mh17.correctiv.org/english/>

¹⁰ Sergei Parkhomenko, *Ibid.*

Chapter 5

The warhead

Analysis of the wreckage found that the port side of MH17's cockpit was punctured by metal pieces.¹ The Dutch journalist-photographer Jeroen Akkermans found three pieces foreign to MH17 in the wreckage at the crash site. He consulted weapons experts for their opinions. Laboratory analysis found they came from a warhead fired by an anti-aircraft weapon called Buk.²

The first of the three metal pieces the experts identified as coming from the casing of the missile warhead. It had the letter І from the Cyrillic alphabet (Photo 5.1).

Photo 5.1 – Missile casing with Cyrillic letter І



Source: Jeroen Akkermans, “BUK-raket bewezen: foto's, video's en analyses,” *rtnieuws*, March 9, 2015, <http://www.rtnieuws.nl/nieuws/binnenland/buk-raket-bewezen-fotos-videos-en-analyses>; and Jeroen Akkermans, “Evidence proving that flight MH-17 was taken down by a BUK missile,” *rtnieuws*, March 19, 2015, <http://www.rtnieuws.nl/nieuws/buitenland/evidence-proving-flight-mh-17-was-taken-down-buk-missile>.

The second piece, in the shape of an hourglass, was identified as one of the thousands of fragments found in a warhead, where they are packed around an explosive. The third piece was found to have come from the inner structure of a missile.

The hourglass-shape piece identified the warhead: “From the hourglass form we can gather all the characteristics of an impact of a 9N314 warhead fragment”, said the *Jane’s Defense Weekly* weapons expert Nicolas De Larrinaga.³

Photo 5.2: A 9N314 warhead.



Source: <http://i.imgur.com/wDXYVth.jpg>.

A 9N314 warhead is pictured in Photo 5.2. It weighs about 70 kilograms, and is packed with a few thousand hourglass-shaped steel fragments. After the explosive

is detonated, the warhead showers the target with the fragments.



The 9N314 warhead is carried by a 9M317 missile [pictured left]. The missile's chief characteristics are: Mach 4 speed; 3-50 km (2-30 miles) range and 30-25,000 m (100-80,000 ft) altitude.⁴ The missile was designed with a built-in radar that homes in on a target set by its operators, to shoot down fast flying jet fighters. It could easily destroy a large target like a Boeing 777 flying at 33,000 feet at a constant cruising speed. The 9M317 flying at Mach 4 would have taken less than 30 seconds to reach the Malaysian Boeing airliner from the launch site, "the charred field", about 26 km away,

According to the *Jane's Defense Weekly* weapons expert Nicolas De Larrinaga, 9M317 missiles are fired by a Buk M1-2 weapon.

The Joint Investigation Team (JIT), made up of investigators from Australia, Belgium, Malaysia, Netherlands, and Ukraine, also thinks that a Buk M1-2 shot down MH17.

According to all of the evidence the JIT has reviewed, which has included more than one million documents, photos and videos, the conclusions to date are that the MH17 was downed by a Buk-M1-2 surface-to-air missile (SAM) launched from a Russian owned battery that was most likely manned by a Russian crew. Photos and video evidence, as

well as interviews with witnesses, prove that the battery was brought across the border from Russia into Ukraine shortly before the shoot down.

Photo 5.3 – Buk M1-2 with 9M317 missile



... The head of the prosecuting team [the Dutch chief prosecutor Fred Westerbeke] then explained that central questions that the investigation is trying to answer are: first, who controlled the radar that provided the Buk battery with targeting information; second, who commanded the crew; and, lastly, who gave the order to fire? Radio and mobile telephone intercepts that have been provided by the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) are being used in this effort."

Source: Reuben F Johnson, "Dutch investigation concludes MH17 downed by Buk missile from Russian battery," *HIS Jane's Defense Weekly*, March 19, 2015, <http://saito-section-9.livejournal.com/1070906.html>.

The Buk M1-2 (Photo 5.3), like its predecessor the Buk M-1, can be recognized by its large front radar dome. NATO designates the Buk M1-2 with the missile 9M317 as Grizzly. U.S. Defense Department calls it SA-17.

The Dutch journalist Akkermans hopes that the identification of the three missile fragments will put an end to the speculation on what weapon shot down MH17:

"I dare to say that we now have three BUK missile fragments to show and four pieces of the plane, based on the laboratory analysis and the findings of the experts in Warsaw, Croydon (suburb of London) and Munich. One physical piece of the murder weapon in the remains of MH17 is enough to blame the BUK missile for this."

Source: Jeroen Akkermans, "Evidence for rocket attack MH17, On to the next puzzle piece," *rtlnieuws*, March 20, 2015, <http://www.rtlnieuws.nl/columns/column/jeroen-akkermans/op-naar-het-volgende-puzzelstukje>.

Endnotes

¹ "Limited damage to cockpit suggests missile exploded around 15 meters in front, left and just above cockpit," *What happened to flight 17*, December 20, 2014, *Ibid.*

² Jeroen Ackermans, "BUK-raket bewezen: foto's, video's en analyses," *rtlnieuws*, March 9, 2015, <http://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/binnenland/buk-raket-bewezen-fotos-videos-en-analyses>.

³ Jeroen Akkermans, "Evidence proving that flight MH-17 was taken down by a BUK missile," *rtlnieuws*, March 19, 2015, <http://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/buitenland/evidence>.

⁴ <http://www.military-today.com/missiles/buk.htm>.

Chapter 6

The Buk

Until July 17, 2014, Russian fighters in Ukraine had only shoulder-held missile launchers, or man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADs). The most sophisticated MANPADs could at best reach aircraft up to 15,000 feet, most of them had a much lower range. None of them could possibly hit an international airliner like the MH17 flying at 34,000 feet. Some of the Ukrainian military aircraft shot down were most likely hit by the Russian military using more sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons from their side of the border.

On July 17, the Russian military, worried that its side risked defeat, decided to introduce Buks in the Donetsk region. In the fifth month of the conflict with Ukraine, this was a serious escalation. If Russia or their so-called rebels had announced publicly the introduction of anti-aircraft weapons that could shoot missiles up to 100,000 feet, the 50 or more international flights scheduled to pass over the region that day would have been re-routed. But they didn't.

In the early hours near the remote village of Sukhodilsk, Luhansk region, two Buks on tank tracks surreptitiously crossed the Ukrainian border in an area held by pro-Russian forces. On the Ukrainian side of the border, a Russian Donetsk militia unit led by a fighter nicknamed Buryat met the two Buks with their crews. Due to a misunderstanding, Buryat had come with only one flatbed trailer. Leaving one of the Buks behind, he transported the other to the city of Donetsk, the capital of the insurgency, about 200 km away.

At 09:08, Buryat telephoned the chief of intelligence of the Donetsk region, Sergei Nikolayevich Petrovsky, aka Khmuryi¹, to say he had arrived in Donetsk with the Buk:

[Buryat] Where should we unload this beauty, Nikolayevich?

[Petrovsky] Which one? This one?

[Buryat] Yes, the one I've brought. I'm already in Donetsk.

[Petrovsky] Is it the one I'm thinking of? B... M-1?

[Buryat] Yes, yes, yes. Buk, Buk.

[Petrovsky] Is it on a flatbed?

[Buryat] Yes, it's on it. We need to unload it somewhere in order to hide it.

[Petrovsky] Is it with a crew?

[Buryat] Yes, with the crew.

[Petrovsky] Don't hide it anywhere. It will go there now. You know where?

[Buryat] Yes, with the crew, but they need a bit of time, so they can look it over.

Source: SBU intercepted telephone conversation between Petrovsky and Buryat (identity unknown), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgdqdklrqDA>.

A short time later, Petrovsky telephoned Buryat to inquire whether he had come with one or two Buks, and whether there was a crew, and told him that the Buk would receive an armed escort of tanks to the missile launch area.

[Petrovsky] Have you brought me one or two?

[Buryat] One, one, because of their misunderstanding. They didn't bring over a flatbed to us. They just crossed on their own power.

[Petrovsky] Did it come on its own or a flatbed truck?

[Buryat] It crossed the line [border].

[Petrovsky] And now have you brought it on a flatbed?

*Don't put it anywhere ... I'll tell you where it should go.
It will go together with Vostok [Battalion] tanks.*

Source: *Ibid.*

Twenty minutes after nine, Petrovsky ordered his deputy nicknamed Sanych to accompany the Buk, and told him where the Buk should join its armed escort:

[Petrovsky] Sanych, the point is that you will go with my BUK-M. It is on a flatbed truck. Where should I send it so that it can join the escort?

[Sanych] After the motel before you get to Gornostaevka [Hornostaiivka].

[Petrovsky] Just after the motel, right?

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgdqdklrqDA>.

Photo 6.1 – Buk on flatbed pulled by a Volvo truck in Donetsk



Source: Buk in Donetsk at about 10:00 a.m., July 17, 2014 from the magazine *Paris Match*.

At about 10:00, the Buk on the flatbed truck was photographed from a car on Highway 21 (H21) on its way to Vostok Battalion HQ, located at the office building of a disused coal mine on the road from Donetsk to Makiyivka.

At 09:54, Petrovsky instructed an unidentified subordinate to take the Buk near to the village of Pervomaisky [translated as First of May], located just south of the town of Snizhne, about two hours away from Donetsk:

[Petrovsky] Listen to me carefully, immediately after the motel roundabout, call Bibliotekar. You know what will be there. Take only those who returned, as many as you need for the convoy. You go there. Pervomaisky is nearby. Look at the map.

[Unidentified subordinate] OK.

[Petrovsky] You are to stop somewhere in that area [Pervomaisky]. Take there those who are left. Your task is to be a reserve, plus protection for this thing [the Buk], that you will now escort. Gyurza will also join you there. If there is anything else, I'm on line.

[Unidentified subordinate] OK.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgdqdklrqDA>.

The flatbed truck carrying the Buk in Russian-occupied Ukraine was one of a kind. It was a white Volvo truck and had blue bands on both sides of the cabin, with a red flatbed, with sideboards advertising the telephone number of the owner (050) 471-41-80.

According to the owner, Stroimekhanizatsiya of 19 Molodykh Shatkhtariiv Street in Donetsk, the Donetsk militia had seized the truck with the flatbed in the previous month.² The truck transporting the Buk was also seen and photographed on its way to the launch site, in the towns

of Shaktersk, Zuhres, Torez and Snizhne.

At 11:25, eyewitnesses reported that a military convoy passed through the town of Zuhres consisting of three tanks, a ZIL open military truck with gunmen and three civilian cars – a Chevrolet Niva; a Renault Trafic van and a VW Transporter van. At 11:40, a journalist posted on Facebook that a Buk followed by two cars had passed through Zuhres.³ Screen shots show a truck with the Buk on its flatbed, a Zil truck with fighters and a tank passing through Zuhres (Photo 6.2).

Photo 6.2- Buk and convoy in Zuhres
at 11:40 on July 17, 2014



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OJs1dkRWk>

After Zuhres, the Buk and its convoy went through the town of Shaktersk, from where someone tweeted: “Shaktersk Kamaz (a heavy duty truck), terror, three tanks, earlier maybe a Buk passed through covered with a tarpaulin”.⁵

At 12:30, the Buk was photographed in Torez.⁶ The photo shows the Volvo flatbed truck with the tarpaulin-covered Buk (Photo 6.3)

A few days later, the journalists Max Seddon and Shaun Walker interviewed residents in Torez and verified that a Buk had passed through the town on July 17:

“Several locals near the StroiDom store in Torez, about 10 miles from where the plane crashed, said on Tuesday [July 22, 2014] that they had seen what appeared to be a missile launcher driving through their town a few hours before the plane was shot down last Thursday.”

Source: Max Seddon, “Locals Say Rebels Moved Missile Launcher Shortly Before Malaysian Plane Was Downed,” Buzzfeed, July 22, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/maxseddon/locals-say-rebels-moved-missile-launcher-shortly-before-mala>.

Photo 6.3: Buk in Torez at 12:30 on July 17, 2014



Source: <https://pp.vk.me/c620223/v620223686/cbc9/nTPehh8Xke8.jpg>, and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU5NSSzYgk>.

“Just before lunchtime last Thursday, prior to the Malaysia Airlines plane’s takeoff, a Buk was driven through Gagarin Street, one of the central thoroughfares of Torez, witnesses said. ... Torez would later be the town where bodies of the

victims were loaded on to refrigerated train cars.”

Source: Shaun Walker, “Ukrainians report sightings of missile launcher on day of MH17 crash,” *The Guardian*, July 22, 2014.

It might be possible to identify some of the individuals of the Vostok Battalion escort from a video taken on the road between Torez and Snizhne. Screen shots taken from a poor quality video show an armored escort without identification markings: a military truck, three tanks, and a VW transporter.⁷ Similar individuals, and an identical armored truck and a VW transporter, as well as tanks were filmed in a Vostok Battalion parade staged by Ossetians in Donetsk on July 11, 2014.⁸

The Buk with its escort arrived in Snizhne at around 13:00. Waiting for them were five Oplot Battalion tanks that had arrived earlier in Snizhne. [Oplot’s commander, Alexander Zakharchenko, became the prime minister of the Donetsk Republic on November 2, 2014.]

In an extraordinary coincidence, a journalist from *Associated Press (AP)* was in Snizhne on that day. He filed a dispatch at 13:06, before the shooting down of Flight MH17 at 16:20. He reported that he had seen a Buk in the town center along with two cars and seven tanks, parked at a gas station.⁹

The correspondent also said that a soldier without insignia emerged from one of the cars escorting the Buk and confronted him:

The convoy stopped. A man in sand-colored camouflage without identifying insignia — different from the green camouflage the rebels normally wear — approached the journalists. The man wanted to make sure they had not recorded any images of the missile launcher. Satisfied that

they hadn't, the convoy moved on."

Source: "What happened? The day Flight 17 was downed," *AP* in *Washington Post*, July 25, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/what-happened-the-day-flight-17-was-downed/2014/07/25/716c36e4-142b-11e4-ac56-773e54a65906_story.html.

Photo 6.4: Buk in Snizhne at 13:27 on July 17, 2014



Source: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Bsxq9V3IYAEAmQA.jpg>. Note, the Buk was driving on its tracks passing 13, Karapetyana Street in Snizhne.

BBC Panorama interviewed witnesses who corroborated the *AP* dispatch:

"Three eyewitnesses, all civilians, separately told Panorama that they saw a missile-launcher in rebel-held territory a few hours before the Boeing jet was hit."

Source: John Sweeney, "MH17 disaster: Russians 'controlled Buk missile system,'" *BBC Panorama*, Sept. 8, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-29109398>.

One eyewitness saw the missile-launcher roll off a low-loader [flatbed] at Snezhnoye (Snizhne):

'We just saw it being offloaded and when the BUK started its engine the exhaust smoke filled the whole town square.'

Source: *Ibid.*

The *Buk* on its tracks left Snizhne at 13:27 (Photo 6.4). It drove towards the village of Pervomaisky (Photo 6.5), as instructed by the Donetsk militia intelligence chief Petrovsky. It selected the already mentioned launch site on a field between the villages Pervomaisky and Chervonyi Zhovten.

Photo 6.5 – *Buk* leaving Snizhne on Gagarin Road



Source: A screenshot from a July 17, 2014 video of the *Buk* led by a car (hidden by

trees) on Gagarin Road, Highway TO522, driving away from Snizhne. Ukraine@war, <http://ukraineatwar.blogspot.nl/2014/07/russian-transport-of-buk-into-ukraine.html>, and “Orudie ubiistva malaiziistev Snezhnoe,” Brown Moses, July 17, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlOqhnodT70>.

At 16:20, it fired its fatal missile at MH17.

Following the shooting down of MH17, one of the Buk’s crew members became separated from the others, for reasons yet to be understood. He was found seven hours after the missile was fired at MH17, when at 21:32, a Donetsk militiaman telephoned his commander:

[militiaman] ... here is the fighter who got separated from that ... from the launcher, from that crew.

[commander] What launcher?

[militiaman] Well, from the Buk

[commander] From the Buk?

[militiaman] Yes.

[commander] And where is he, the fucker?

[militiaman] Here, standing at the checkpoint.

[commander] Bring him here, fuck. Drive, I will be waiting in Snizhne near the petrol station.

[militiaman] OK.

Source: “Joint Investigation Team MH17 calls for witnesses transport & launch BUK,” JITNH17, March 30, 2015, www.JITMH17.com, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olQNpTxSnTo>.

At around 05:00 hours on July 17, 2014, the Volvo truck transporting the Buk was photographed in the Russian controlled city of Luhansk (Photo 6.6). The Buk was carrying one less missile. It was on the same flatbed, pulled by the same white Volvo truck, as photographed numerous times the previous day across the Donetsk region. It was heading

in the direction of the Russian border. This picture of the *Buk* with the missing missile is one of the most important pieces of evidence that the Russian *Buk* fired the missile that hit MH17.

Photo 6.6 – *Buk* in Luhansk at 05:00 on July 18, 2014



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4HJmev5xg0>.

A military weapons specialist commented on the video of the *Buk* in Luhansk:

*[it] shows the *Buk* Missile Launcher back on the same trailer as seen in previous videos, with one missile clearly missing...”*

Source: Eliot Higgins, “MH17 Missile Can’t Hide From These Internet Sleuths,” *The Daily Beast*, August 2, 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/08/01/the-buk-that-could-an-open-source-odyssey.html>.

In another intercepted telephone call on the morning of July 18, 2014, an unidentified commander said he didn’t understand what had happened to the *Buk* and its crew.

His subordinate explained that the group led by Bibliotekar had delivered the Buk on the trailer to Russia, and that the crew had also got there safely:

[militiaman] Bibliotekar – This is the group that transported it.

[commander] Oh.

[militiaman] On the trailer. I have just made contact with them by telephone. They are all in Russia ...

Source: “Joint Investigation Team MH17 calls for witnesses transport & launch BUK,” *Ibid.*

On July 21, 2014, Lieutenant-General Andrei Kartopolov of the Russian military general staff denied that the Buk on the video with one less missile was Russian. The general said it was Ukrainian because the photograph had been taken in Ukrainian-held Krasnoarmiisk, as it advertised a car dealership with an address in Krasnoarmiisk.¹¹ However, the Krasnoarmiisk address seen on his photograph was not on the original billboard. It was added to the billboard for the news conference.

That the video was taken in Russian-controlled Luhansk is undeniable. As late as November 2014, researchers from saw the billboard for the car dealership “Bohdan” at the same crossroads in Luhansk.¹² The video of the Buk with the missing missile was taken in Russian controlled Luhansk and not in Ukrainian Krasnoarmiisk.

“The facts are undeniable that the video was taken in Luhansk. Bloggers, including Russian, have identified almost every item seen in the brief video, including buildings, trees, and overhead electric power cables.”

Source: Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, “Russia this week,” *The Interpreter*, July 25, 2014,
<http://www.interpretermag.com>.

Photo 6.6 : The “guilty” Buk in Russia as “Buk 3?2”



Source: the “guilty” Buk in Russia as “Buk 3?2”: “Buk in Stary Oskol,” *MH17 Buk, October 21, 2014*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEV3DX19_t8.

The Buk with the missing missiles crossed the border into Russia on July 18 at 05:00, reported the Dutch-led Joint Investigation Team MH17.

The investigative website Bellingcat identified the Buk accused of shooting down MH17 in Ukraine as Buk 3?2 in Russia [the middle number could not be read, see Photo 6.6]. It found that the “guilty” Buk was photographed in Russia on several occasions.¹³

In the opinion of the Bellingcat MH17 investigation team, the Buk missile launcher filmed and photographed traveling through separatist-held territory on July 17 is the same vehicle seen in the convoy traveling through Russia toward the Ukrainian border in late June 2014.”

Source: T. Allen, A. Haggard, E. Higgins, V. Kivimaki, I Ostanin, A. Toler, "Source of the Separatists' Buk," *Bellingcat*, <https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Origin-of-the-Separatists-Buk-A-Bellingcat-Investigation1.pdf>, www.bwlingcat.com.

Photo 6.7– Sergeant Ivan Krasnoshporin



The “guilty” Buk 3?2 belonged to Russia’s 53rd Kursk Anti-Aircraft Defense Brigade. It was videoed along the way to Ukraine in the Russian towns of Troitsky, Staryi Oskol, Nesznamovo, and Alexeyevka.¹³

A video that brings together most of the information on the “guilty Buk”, and also includes the evidence that Sergeant Ivan Krasnoshporin of Russia’s 53 missile brigade (Photo 6.7) might have been in charge of the operation that shot down MH17 or knows who was.¹⁴

Endnotes

¹ Note, Khmuryi, that is Sergei Petrovsky, should not be confused with the inebriated Donetsk militia officer at the crash site who also called himself Khmuryi or “Grumpy”.

² “Zhurnalisty nashli voditelya gruzovika na kotorom vyvozili ZRK ‘Buk’ v Rossiyu,” *Inforesist*, July 30, 2014, <http://inforesist.org/zhurnalisty-nashli-voditelya-gruzovika-na-kotorom-vyvozili-zrk-buk-v-rossiyu/>, 18:36.

³ Roman Bochkala, *Facebook*, July 17, 2014 at 4:07 and 4:27, <https://www.facebook.com/bochkala/posts/771322946253430>.

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OJs1dksRwk>

⁵ “shakhtersk kamazterorov, 3 tankapredyetim vozmoshno proekhal buk, nakrytyi tentom,” July 17, 2014, *MnstrstsvZdrvgsmsIDNR@spice4russia*, <https://twitter.com/spice4russia/status/489706440899432449>.

⁶ Roman Bochkala, *Ibid.*

⁷ Vitalii Verednyi, “SOS!! Na Donbasse Terroristy!!! Tanki Torez-Snezhnoe,” *Vitaliy Vrednyi*, July 17, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0tkiyKXvwY>.

⁸ “Donetsk. Posvyashchaetsya osetinskim dobrovoltsam! Batalon ‘Vostok’,” *Novorossiya*, July 11, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_3uo5f2YFM.

⁹ “What happened? The day Flight 17 was downed.” *AP*, July 25, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/what-happened-the-day-flight-17-was-downed/2014/07/25/716c36e4-142b-11e4-ac56-773e54a65906_story.html.

¹⁰ “A BUK was seen next to headquarters of separatists,” *What Happened to Flight MH17*, October 12, 2014, <http://www.whathappenedtoflightmh17.com/a-buk-was-seen-next-to-headquarters-of-separatists>.

¹¹ “Press-konferentsiya predtavitelei minoborony Rossii po krusheniyu Boeing-777,” *RT*, July 21, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KS-peo5RcQQo>, and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bNPInuSqfs#t=22>.

¹² Marcus Bensmann and David Crawford, Flight MH17, *CORRECT!V*, January 2015, <https://mh17.correctiv.org/english/#facts>.

¹³ “Exploring the MH17 Linked Buk Convoys in Ukraine and Russia with Mapbox,” *Bellingcat*, November 9, 2014; “Staryi Oskol,” *Andrei Cherkashin*, June 6, 2014, http://vk.com/video2967252_169073239?hash=E1DEB-210DAGE410A, and “Voennaya tekhnika Staryi Oskol,” *Goroskop*, June 25, 2014, <http://Goroskop.odnoklassniki.Ru/video/13856344715>, and <http://goroskop.odnoklassniki.ru/video/14723648043>.

¹⁴ Ivan Koromislo, ”Obnovlennoe video kak sbivaly malaziiskii boing,” November 23, 2014, <https://youtu.be/R04nCLIqy4E>.

Chapter 7

The Donetsk militia commanders

At 16:17, about three minutes before the missile destroyed MH17, a subordinate with the nickname of Naimantes telephoned the Horlivka militia commander, Igor Nikolayevich Bezler, aka Bes or Satan, with the news that an aircraft was approaching (Horlivka was under MH17's flight path):



Bezler

[Naimantes] *Bird, bird” flying to you.*

[Bezler] *A “bird” flying to us?*

[Naimantes] *A single one.*

[Bezler] *Reconnaissance plane or a big one?*

[Naimantes] *I can’t see behind the clouds; [it] is too high.*

[Bezler] *Understood. Received.*

Report to the commanders. (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emfVpkBKoow>)

This conversation suggested that the Donetsk militia commanders had advance intelligence that a Ukrainian aircraft was to appear at this time over the Donetsk region. The spotter's news was a signal for militia commanders to send search parties to look for the aircraft and pilots expected to be downed by the Buk.

Within three minutes of this telephone call, the Buk fired its missile at MH17. The surprise for Bezler was that the “bird” turned out not to be a Ukrainian military aircraft but a civilian airliner.

At 16:40, twenty minutes after MH17 was destroyed, Bezler telephoned his chief in Russian military intelligence, Colonel Vasili Nikolayevich Geranin, with the news that the Buk had shot down a Ukrainian military airplane. Judging by the utterance “Pilots. Where are the pilots?” the GRU officer also expected the Buk to have shot down a Ukrainian military plane:

[Bezler] Just shot down a plane. It was Sapper's group.

It went down beyond Yenakiyevo. It fell like an apple.

[Geranin] Pilots. Where are the pilots?

[Bezler] [We have] set off to search for the downed plane and take pictures of it. A plume of smoke is visible.

[Geranin] How many minutes ago?

[Bezler] About 30 minutes ago.

Source: “Bez dopoviv pro zbytyi litak svoyemu kuratoru,”<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5E8kDo2n6g>.

An important item stood out in the above conversation. Bezler credited the shooting-down to a person nicknamed Sapper and his group. Who is “Sapper”? An unnamed source told journalists:

“the rebel official who spoke to the AP about the incident said that Bezler commanded another fighter, code-named Sapper, who was the ranking rebel officer with the missile launcher at the time. According to the rebel official, Sapper led a rebel unit, about half of which was made up of men from far eastern Russia, many from the island of Sakhalin off Russia's Pacific coast.”

Source: Yuras Karmanu and Peter Leonard, “AP Journalists Saw Rebels With BUK Missiles Hours Before MH17 Crashed,” AP, July 25, 2014, updated 5:59 pm EDT.

It is not clear if Sapper's "rebel unit" was identical with the crew that came with the Buk to Ukraine on July 17, 2014. Was Sapper, "the ranking rebel officer with the missile launcher at the time", the officer with the Buk who confronted the *AP* journalist in Snizhne?¹ The only thing clear is that the crew came with the Buk from Russia, and returned after firing the missile.

Within the first hour of the destruction of MH17, Donetsk militia commanders appeared to have a variety of interpretations of what the Buk had shot down. The intelligence chief of the Donetsk militia Sergei Petrovsky, aka Khmuryi, who was in charge of supervising the Buk in the Donetsk region, told Bezler's deputy, nicknamed Botsman,² that the Buk had shot down a Ukrainian military jet – "We've just hit a plane, a SU-type, because we've got a Buk-M", and "Thank God a Buk-M arrived this morning":



Petrovsky

[Petrovsky] Yes, Botsman, I'm listening.

[Botsman] Hello, big brother. How are you?

[Petrovsky] Not so good. We are in Marinovka [Marynivka border post with Russia, about 12 kilometers south of the Buk launch site]. That's why [I'm] not well. Carrying on.

[Botsman] What's wrong?

[Petrovsky] What do you think?

[The Ukrainian military is] attacking with "Grad" [multiple-rocket launchers] all the time, finally now we're having a little break. We've just hit a plane, a



Botsman

SU-type [actually MH17], because we've got BUK-M. They [Ukraine's military] are now in Zelenopillya [on the Russian border], trying to break free, but their only way out is through me. Yesterday we hit two SU jets. Today, another two. [Note: Petrovsky was mistaken that two SU-25s were shot down on July 17. Only one plane, MH17, was shot down.]

Thank God "BUK-M" arrived today in the morning. It has become easier. But in general, of course, it's tough. [Botsman] What can I say, if you need anything, call me – and I will come immediately.

[Petrovsky] Thanks, brother. I'm going in two hours ... Seems like it's a lull. In two hours, I'm heading to Donetsk because I was sent three more "Gvozdika" [122-mm howitzers on tank tracks]. I'll bring the "Gvozdikas" here, because it's tough now.

[Botsman] Maybe we should cover them with Grad [multiple-rocket launchers]?

[Petrovsky] The thing is that we have Grad, but no spotter. And secondly, we are waiting for Russia to fuck them from their side.

Source: “Zdobuti SBU perehovory terorystiv ‘Buk-M’,” SBU, July 18, 2014; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgdqdklrqDA>; This is re-translation based on the one by Iryna Yeroshko, Katya Gorchinskaya, and Mark Rachkevych, “SBU releases more conversations implicating Russia in shooting down Malaysia Airlines flight,” *Kyiv Post*, July 19, 2014.

At this time, Petrovsky was not far from the Buk, where his Donetsk militia forces along with the Russian military were attempting to eliminate the Ukrainian military along the Donetsk border with Russia.³

Petrovsky’s conversation provided evidence that Russia

not only supplied the Buk and its crew, but other heavy military weapons, like “Gvozdikas” (122-mm howitzers on tank tracks) and “Grads” (multi-rocket launchers). Moreover, it was ready to supply any other weapons the militia wanted, and to bombard Ukrainian forces from the Russian side of the border.

At 16:50, within thirty minutes of the downing of MH17, Petrovsky’s commander-in-chief, Igor Girkin, aka Strelkov, triumphantly announced on the social media site *Vkontakte* that “an AN-26 was shot down” and maybe “an SU”:

*“17.07.2014 17:50 (Moscow Time) [or 16:50 Kyiv time]
Report from the militia.*

In the area of Torez, we have just shot down an AN-26 airplane, it is scattered about somewhere by the Progress coal mine.

We warned them – don’t fly ‘in our sky.’

Here is a video confirmation of the latest ‘bird drop.’

The bird fell beyond the slag heap, it did not damage the residential sector.

Civilians were not hurt.

There is also information about a second downed airplane, apparently an SU.”

Source: Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, “Was Col. Strelkov’s Dispatch about a Downed “Ukrainian Plane” Authentic?,” The Interpreter, July 18, 2014, www.interpretermag.com/was-col-strelkovs-dispatch-about-a-downed-ukrainian-plane-authentic/.

He attached two videos from his supporters. In one of them, a child is heard welcoming the shooting down of a Ukrainian military aircraft by the Donetsk militia.⁴

Later, a post appeared by his supporters denying that Girkin had ever posted that an AN-26 was shot down, saying that it was a “plant” by Ukrainians, that the “separatists”

never had a Buk, and accusing the Ukrainian military of shooting down MH17.⁵

Likewise, Russia's mass media's initial response hailed the Donetsk militia for shooting down a Ukrainian military transporter, and then changed the story to blame the Ukrainian military for shooting down a civilian airliner.⁶

In an interview with an Italian newspaper, published two days after the incident, Girkin denied that his militia had shot down MH17. He argued that the militia didn't have a weapon that could shoot down a passenger aircraft flying as high as 10 km:

[La Repubblica] ... Do you totally rule out the possibility that it may have been your men who hit the aircraft?
[Girkin] Of course. We do not have missiles that can reach such heights. But the Ukrainians do. And they have deployed them precisely in the Shakhtarsk district [the district in which MH17 debris fell].

Source: di Nicola Lombardozzi, "Girkin: 'Kyiv is lying, it was them,'" *La Repubblica*, July 19, 2014, http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2014/07/19/news/girkin_kiev_mente_sono_stati_loro-91936346/.

He repeated this on Russian television where he added the bizarre claim that blacks were fighting on the side of Ukraine: "Among the dead are mercenaries of the Negroid race".⁷

At 17:11, less than an hour after the MH17 incident, a militiaman from Khodakovsky's Vostok battalion erroneously reported that it was the Don Cossacks who shot down MH17:

"The Chernukhin folks shot down the plane. The ones from the Chernukhin checkpoint. The Cossacks who are based in Chernukhin."

Source: <http://youtu.be/BbyZYgSXdyw>. Note: The village of Chernukhin [or Chornukhyn in Ukrainian] is located in the administrative region of Luhansk on the border with the Donetsk region, not far from the MH17 crash site.



Khodakovsky

The only admission by a pro-Russian Donetsk militia commander that a Buk shot down MH17 came from the Vostok Battalion commander Alexander Khodakovsky. He told *Reuters* that a Buk that came from the Luhansk region was “provoked” by Ukrainian military jets to fire the fatal missile at MH17. He blamed Ukraine’s military for deploying

jet fighters at a time when commercial airliners were flying over the Donetsk region:

[Khodakovsky] I knew a Buk was coming from Luhansk. At that moment, I was told that a Buk from Luhansk was coming under the flag of the LNR [Luhansk People’s Republic] toward Snizhne. I now know about that Buk. I heard about it.

[Anton Zverev] Did it arrive [at its destination]?

[Khodakovsky] I think it was sent back. I found out about it exactly when I learned that this tragedy had happened. Most likely, it was sent back in order to conceal the evidence of its presence. But you understand, this question should be considered in the following context. Ukraine had received information well in advance that the insurgents, because of Russia, had this kind of weapon. Not only did [Ukraine] do nothing to ensure the safe use of this [weapon], but instead it provoked the use of this kind

of weapon against a civilian airplane that was flying by.”

Source: Recorded interview with Khodakovsky by Anton Zverev on July 23, 2014, “Odyn iz lideriv separatystiv ziznavsya pro isnyuvannya ‘Buka,’ *Radio Svoboda*, November 24, 2014, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/media/video/ukraine-rebel-commander-buk-missile/25469080.html>; and Anton Zverev, “Exclusive: Ukraine rebel commander acknowledges fighters had BUK missile,” *Reuters*, July 23, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/07/23/us-ukraine-crisis-commander-exclusive-iduskb0fs1v920140723>.

Khodakovsky produced no evidence to corroborate that Ukraine launched air strikes just as MH17 flew by. As a matter of fact, as many as fifty-five international airliners flew over the Donetsk region that day, but the Russian Buk only chose to shoot down MH17 [for why see Chapter 9].

No evidence has been presented that Ukraine launched air strikes near Snizhne on July 17. However, the day before Ukrainian jets had attacked Donetsk militia positions near Snizhne at Marynivka and Stepanivka, not far from where the Russian Buk parked itself the next day.⁸

Within hours of *Reuters* publishing the interview, Russia’s news agencies produced Khodakovsky’s denial: “I did not say anything like this to *Reuters*. ” “I have a recording of the conversation,” he told *Russia Today*¹⁰ and RIA-Novosti.⁹ However, Khodakovsky failed to release his recording, while the *Reuters* journalist, Anton Zverev, published his.¹⁰

Khodakovsky’s admission contained half-truths. He didn’t say that the Buk came from Russia with a Russian crew. He didn’t mention his role in providing the armed convoy for the Buk from the city of Donetsk to the missile launch near Snizhne. Nor did he mention his attempt to steal the black boxes for “Moscow”.

The Donetsk militia’s C-in-C at the time, Girkin, has

not forgiven Khodakovsky for admitting that a Buk shot down MH17. After being removed as the military leader on August 14, 2014, he carried on as an armchair general from Moscow, from where he accused Khodakovsky of being “subversive” and of holding “treasonable” views about the Donetsk Republic.¹¹

Endnotes

¹ “What-happened? The day Flight 17 was downed,” *AP*, July 25, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/what-happened-the-day-flight-17-was-downed/2014/07/25/716c36e4-142b-11e4-ac56-773e54a65906_story.html.

² Note, in the first week of November 2014, Botsman replaced Bezler as the commander of Horlivka.

³ Note, see the war situation map for July 17, 2014: “Fotofakt. Karta boiovykh dii ATO:17 lypnya,” *Segodnya.ua*, July 17, 2014, <http://ukr.segodnya.ua/regions/donetsk/karta-boevyh-deystviy-ato-17-iyulya-537482.html>.

⁴ “Ukraina. Torez. Terroristy DNR sbili passazhirskyi Boing 17.07.2014,” *Mrachny Molochnik*, July 17, 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ciwHTawwqRU.

⁵ Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, “Was Col. Strelkov’s Dispatch about a Downed “Ukrainian Plane” Authentic?,” *The Interpreter*, July 18, 2014, www.interpretermag.com/was-col-strelkovs-dispatch-about-a-downed-ukrainian-plane-authentic/

⁶ Boris Nemtsov, “Who shot down MH17? (as revealed by pro-Kremlin sources),” *Euromaidan Press*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CqXmp-WQcjQ&feature=youtu.be>.

⁷ *Rossiya TV* 24, July 28, 2014.

⁸ “Fotofakt. Karta boiovykh dii ATO:17 lypnya,” *Segodnya.ua*, *Ibid.*

⁹ “Khodakovskyi oprovergaet, chto govoril pro primenenie ‘Buka’ opolentsami,” *Rianovosti*, July 23, 2014, <http://ria.ru/world/20140723/1017273394.html>.

¹⁰ Note, the July 23, 2014 recorded interview with Khodakovsky by Anton Zverev appeared on the Internet: “Odyn iz lideriv separatystiv ziznavsy pro isnyuvannya ‘Buka,’ *Radio Svoboda*, November 24, 2014, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/media/video/ukraine-rebel-commander-buk-missile/25469080.html>.

¹¹ “Igor Strelkov. Kasaemo intervyu Seryeya Nikolaevich,” *Novosteman*, November 11, 2014, <http://novosteman.ru/igor-strelkov-kasaemo-intervyu-sergeya-nikolaevicha>.

Chapter 8

Separatists or Russians?

Photo 8.1 - Putin's men in Donetsk



Photo of the three leading officials of the Donetsk People's Republic at the time of the shooting down of MH17: on the left, the Commander-in-Chief of the Donetsk militia - Igor Girkin aka Strelkov; on the right, the prime minister, Aleksander Borodai, and behind them, the first deputy prime minister, Vladimir Antyufeyev. The three Russian citizens prior to appearing in Ukraine took part in various foreign Russian military actions.

Germany's intelligence service, BND, has been reported as saying that Ukrainian "separatists", and not Russians, shot down MH17. On October 19, 2014, *Der Spiegel* published a brief article, without a source, stating that the BND chief Gerhard Schindler believed that "separatists" shot down

MH17 with a Buk seized from the Ukrainian military.¹

Apparently the BND chief said this to a secret meeting of Germany's parliamentary control committee, composed of nine members representing every political party in the Reichstag. The MP André Hahn of Die Linke supposedly leaked this information to *Spiegel*. Another participant in the meeting, the CDU/CSU representative Armin Schuster, didn't deny this was said, but described it as just a preferred hypothesis.²

Likewise, Munich's *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* reported that the assessment of "the Federal Intelligence Service (BND) and also a large number of other Western services" is "that pro-Russian separatists first seized the missile defense system at a Ukrainian base and then probably accidentally shot down the civilian plane". It reported the BND chief as saying that this was the "best case scenario" on what happened to MH17.³

If the BND chief holds the view that separatists shot down MH17 using a Buk seized from the Ukrainian military, then this goes against all the available evidence that a Russian military Buk with a crew came to Ukraine and shot down MH17, while the "separatists" played the role of armed guards in this tragedy.

As Schindler has not publicly explained his "best case scenario" there is no way to evaluate what he knows compared to what is in the public domain.

What the BND chief - and others- can be criticized for is the use of the word "separatists". By definition, only Ukrainian citizens who advocate separation from Ukraine can be called separatists. It would be inaccurate to call people "Ukrainian separatists" if they were Russian citizens, and especially if they were Russian military officers.

At the time of the MH17 incident, most of the Donetsk militia commanders were serving Russian military or FSB [formerly KGB] officers, and in direct contact with the Main Intelligence Directorate, abbreviated as GRU, of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. This included the commander-in-chief of the Donetsk region Igor Girkin, the chief of intelligence Sergei Petrovsky, the Don Cossack “Ataman” Nicolai Kozitsyn, and the Horlivka commander Igor Bezler, in charge of Sapper, described as “the ranking rebel officer with the missile launcher at the time”. During the April 14, 2014 seizure of Horlivka by Russian special forces, Bezler identified himself as a lieutenant-colonel in the Russian military.⁴

Petrovsky, aka Khmuryi, was a Russian citizen and professional soldier. Prior to appearing in eastern Ukraine, he also served in Chechnya as an intelligence officer, where he gave an interview in which he said all Chechens who resisted Russia’s rule should be exterminated.⁵

His commander-in-chief, Girkin aka Strelkov, was also a Russian citizen⁶ and a FSB officer. Before appearing in Crimea and Donetsk region in 2014, Girkin fought with Russian special forces in former Yugoslavia, in Transdniester and in the two Chechen wars. He was the leading FSB officer in the covert invasion of eastern Ukraine, where he has been accused of committing war crimes.⁷

The Don Cossack Kozitsyn has also been accused of war crimes and kidnappings of OSCE officials in eastern Ukraine.⁸ He too was involved as a Russian fighter in Transdniester, Ingushetia, Abkhazia, and former Yugoslavia, where he was photographed with Slobodan Milosevic.

As for the BND’s apparent view that the Buk was seized from the Ukrainian military, all available evidence

contradicts it. The Bellingcat investigation⁹ showed that the “guilty” Buk came from and returned to the military base of Russia’s 53rd Kursk anti-aircraft brigade. A study found that no functioning Buks were seized from the Ukrainian side by the “separatists”.¹⁰ Of course, cannibalized Buks could have been sent back to Russia for repair and used in Ukraine. But would that make them Ukrainian?

At the time of the MH17 tragedy, not only were most of the Donetsk militia commanders Russian citizens with Russian military ranks, but so were the prime minister of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and his deputy. The prime minister, Aleksander Borodai, a FSB officer specializing in propaganda, fought for Russia in Transdniestra and Chechnya. At a press conference in Donetsk, he justified why Russian citizens held leading positions in the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR):

“Given that the Donbass liberation movement focuses on the Russian Federation, spiritually, if you like, people here wait for those coming from Moscow. In the best understanding, they hope and pray this happens. People from Moscow will make up more and more of the composition of the DPR.”

Source: “Polynaya tekstovaya versiya press-conferentsii A. Borodaya, I. Strelkova, I. V. Antyufeeva 10.07.2014,” *DMR Today*, July 11, 2014, <http://dnr.today>.

After explaining why the local Donetsk population supposedly expected Russian citizens to rule them, Borodai presented to the press his new first deputy, Vladimir Yurevich Antyufeyev. This Russian citizen unashamedly presented himself as a fighter against “nationalism-fascism” in Latvia, Transdniestra and Georgia. He described his new job in the Donetsk Republic as organizing a security apparatus

to protect the people from “national-fascist Ukraine”. In fact, Antyufeyev’s professional expertise as a KGB/FBS officer has been in hunting down opponents of Russian imperialism like a member of the Spanish Inquisition.

The only prominent “separatist” was the Donetsk commander of the Vostok Battalion, Alexander Khodakovsky, the former head of the Ukrainian State Security (SBU) Alfa special forces in Donetsk. Unlike the Russians Borodai, Petrovsky and Girkin, he disdained the symbols of “separatism”, including the name of the Donetsk People’s Republic. “Personally I am not at all clear what it is; I have not paid much attention to it. The main thing is to fight the enemy, and it doesn’t matter in what form”.¹¹

For Khodakovsky the enemy is Ukraine: “In practice, we are not fighting for ourselves, but for Russia.” His Donetsk Vostok Battalion, the largest and best armed in the region, was the means to fight his enemy. From its origin it has relied on Russian citizens making up its ranks, whether from Russia, Chechnya or Ossetia. Despite heavy losses, as in the battles for Donetsk airport,¹² the Russian military has replenished his battalion with a constant stream of fighters, who want to kill for President Putin’s “New Russia”.

The last word on the subject of Donetsk “separatists” versus invaders goes to the last elected mayor of Donetsk, Oleksandr Lukyanchenko. He left his Donetsk mayoral post shortly after the MH17 incident.

Once in Kyiv, he blamed Ukraine’s government for allowing the city to be taken over by armed groups from Russia. He urged the government to stop calling it an anti-terrorist operation, and call it what it was from the start – a war against a Russian invasion – “The Russians crossed the border. We should call this action by its name.”¹³

Endnotes

¹ Hubert Gude and Fidelius Schmid, “Deadly Ukraine Crash: German Intelligence Claims Pro-Russian Separatists Downed MH17,” *Der Spiegel*, October 19, 2014

² George Knight, “Onjuiste berichten over MH17 houden misverstanden in de lucht,” *Blog*, <https://georgeknightlang.wordpress.com/2014/10/21/onjuiste-berichten-over-mh17-houden-misverstanden-in-de-lucht/>

³ Hans Leyendecker: “Coincidental Shoot-Down”, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung (Electronic Edition)*, October 25, 2014.

⁴ Oleksiy Honcharenko, “Nastoyashchiy podpolkovnik,” *Ukrainska Pravda*, April 16, 2014 <http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/goncharenko/534e20581d582/>.

⁵ Vadim Rechkalov, “Chelovek iz drugogo ushchelya,” *Izvestiya*, April, 22, 2003, <http://web.archive.org/web/20030422063447/http://www.izvestia.ru/politic/article31814>.

⁶ Note, Igor Girkin is a Russian citizen with an apartment in Moscow. His Russian passport number is 4506460961, and his address is Shenkurskiy Passage (Proyezd), Building 8-6, Apartment 136.

⁷ Luke Harding and Oksana Grytsenko, “Kidnapping of Ukrainian patriots has Russia’s full support, says Kiev,” *The Guardian*, April 23, 2014.

⁸ “SBU vstanovlya prychetnist ros kazatskykh struktur …,” *SBU*, June 4, 2014, http://youtu.be/KFedPYqS_JA.

⁹ T. Allen, A. Haggard, E. Higgins, V. Kivimaki, I Ostanin, A. Toler, “MH17: Source of the Separatists’ Buk,” *A Bellingcat Investigation*, <https://www.bellingcat.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Origin-of-the-Separatists-Buk-A-Bellingcat-Investigation1.pdf>, www.belllingcat.com; and Eliot Higgins, “MH17-Cataloging Ukrainian and Russian Buk,” *Bellingcat*, September 20, 2014, <https://bellingcat.checkdesk.org/en/story/67>

¹⁰ “Google Earth show Russia used photos from 2010 to prove its proxies captured a Buk,” *Ukraine@war*, October 20, 2014, <http://ukraineatwar.blogspot.nl/2014/10/google-earth-shows-russia-used-photos.html>

¹¹ “Komandir batalona ‘Vostok’: Kiiev schel, chto dlya nego region poteryan,” RIA Novosti, June 4, 2014, <http://ria.ru/interview/20140604/1010528204.html>.

¹² JV Koshiw, “The Unwanted Corpses of Russian Warriors,” *Facebook*, July 4, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/jaroslav.koshiw/posts/10203409300609994>.

¹³ Aleksandr Lukyanchenko, “U zhitelei donbass net i ne bylo zhelaniya otsoedinyatsya ot Ukrayiny, myer Donetska,” *UkrLife TV*, November 26, 2014.

Chapter 9

Why shoot down MH17?

Table 9.1 – Flights within Buk’s missile range before and after MH17 shooting down

EEST	Flight No.	Destination
15:19	Flight SQ323	Amsterdam to Singapore;
15:27	GLF4	Private;
15:36	Flight EV170	Los Angeles to Abu Dhabi;
15:50	Flight KC904	Amsterdam to Atyrau
16:20	Flight MH17	Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur;
16:23	Flight SQ351	Copenhagen to Singapore;
16:25	Flight 113	Delhi to Birmingham;
16:55	Flight 9W122	Delhi to London.

Source: Michael West, “MH17: Planes in the area, Two hours of flight activity in the region of the MH17 crash, with the crash at UTC1321 (16:21),” *Flightradar24*, July 24, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hh06SqVx_1Q. Note: The time is Eastern European Summer Time (EEST), which is three hours ahead of UTC.

As the Buk was a mobile launcher, it could have parked anywhere in the Donetsk region and shot down any of the 55 international passenger flights scheduled to fly over the region that day. But at 16:20 the Buk’s crew decided to fire a missile at an aircraft that turned out to be MH17.

Why? Maybe, because at 16:20, judging by the reaction of the C-in-C Girkin, the crew was expecting a Ukrainian military AN-26 transport plane. But instead of an AN-26, MH17 appeared, and the Buk’s crew shot it down. The

explanation could be that simple. However, the Boeing had nothing in common with an AN-26. In order to target, the crew had to fix the missile's radar to the target's altitude, speed and direction.

MH17 was a Boeing 777 flying along an internationally designated flight path supervised by Ukrainian as well as Russian air traffic controllers during its flight across eastern Ukraine. It was flying at 33,000 feet, 1,000 feet above the designated safety level. The maximum altitude for an AN-26 is 24,000 feet. Three days earlier, the safety level for commercial airliners had been changed from 16,000 to 32,000 feet because a Ukrainian AN-26 had been shot down.

MH17 was flying at a cruising ground speed of 925 kph, whereas an AN-26's top speed is 540 kph. MH17's transponder identified it as a commercial civilian airliner. The AN-26, as a military plane, would not have identified itself.

MH17 had two jet engines, while AN-26 is a twin-engine turboprop.

Was the Buk's crew so incompetent that they targeted an aircraft that had none of the characteristics of an AN-26 transporter? Or did they shoot it down deliberately? Only the Russian government can answer these questions.

Instead of taking responsibility for the shooting down of MH17, the Russian government and its supporters have dreamed up endless scenarios. Dozens have been presented on the Russian government's international propaganda TV channel, *Russia Today*. What *RT* falsifications have in common is that they ignore the evidence of the Russian *Buk* and blame the Ukrainian military.

The origin of the fantasy scenarios is the Russian military press conference on July 21, 2014, at which the generals stated that a Ukrainian military SU jet or a Ukrainian

Buk shot down MH17.¹ As for the evidence that it was a Russian Buk, photographed with a missing missile in Russian-occupied Luhansk, they falsely claimed it had been photographed not in Luhansk but in a Ukrainian city. The generals' explanation of how and who shot down MH17 has been thoroughly discredited by analysts.²

The photograph of the Russian Buk in Luhansk with a missing missile, and the photographs of it in Snizhne near the launch site, together with the fragments of the warhead found at the crash site, constitute the primary evidence that a Russian Buk shot down the Malaysian airliner.

The prize for the most original fantasy scenario should go to Pavel Gubarev, the self-proclaimed governor of the Donetsk region. He told Russian TV that Ukraine's military had shot a missile at MH17 from a Buk not in the Donetsk region, but in central Ukraine. Afterwards, the damaged plane continued to fly for another 200 km until it crashed in the Donetsk region.³

Ukraine's official scenario was presented by the security service, SBU, which accused the Russian military of bungling a covert action by mistakenly shooting the wrong aircraft at the right time, but in the wrong place.

The head of the SBU, Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, said that the Russian Buk had intended to bring down a Russian airliner just after 16:00. The "bungling" hypothesis hinges on the Donetsk commanders, who, being new arrivals from Russia – in particular the intelligence chief of the Donetsk militia, Petrovsky – directed the Buk to the wrong launch site. He directed the Buk to near the village of Pervomaisky west of Donetsk, under the flight path of MH17. However, according to the SBU, it was supposed to be parked near a different Pervomaisky, a village with the same name, but

east of Donetsk under the flight path of the Russian airliner Aeroflot AFL-1074, the flight from Moscow to Larnaca.

The SBU chief said both airliners appeared at approximately the same time, at the same height and speed, and near villages with the same name, except one was west of Donetsk and the other east. He said that the shooting of an Aeroflot airliner as it flew over Ukrainian-held territory would have provided Russia with an excuse for a full scale invasion of Ukraine.⁴ There is no evidence to corroborate this hypothesis except for the coincidence of time, altitude, speed and place names.

What the SBU chief failed to explain was why Ukraine's jets failed to destroy the Buk, that the public and journalists were tracking in real time on the Internet. The anti-aircraft weapon had traveled 200 kilometers on a flatbed pulled by a distinctive Volvo truck from the Russian border to the city of Donetsk, then for another seventy kilometers to the launch site. Only a convoy of three tanks and a truckload of gunmen protected it. Civilians and journalists tracked the Buk with its convoy in real time, with *AP* filing a dispatch and others posting photographs on the Internet. After the Buk shot down MH17, it fled another 200 km on a flatbed trailer to the Russian border without being attacked.

The study by the Germany-based journalists' collective *CORRECT!V* wrote that Russia was responsible for shooting down MH17, and that the Buk fired its missile at MH17 either "intentionally" or "in a moment of panic". But it also concluded that Ukraine must take some responsibility because it might have provoked the Buk by allowing its jets to hide among civilian aircraft:

"The Ukrainian government takes partial responsibility. It used the passengers of civilian aircrafts as human

shields in air attacks on Russian tanks. Its fighter jets hid among planes packed with vacationers, placing hundreds of innocent lives at risk.”

Source: Marcus Bensmann and David Crawford, *Flight MH17*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0AzHUI1M-Y>, January 2015, <https://mh17.correctiv.org/english>. This Internet version is in English. It is a translation of the German publication by Marcus Bensmann and David Crawford, *Flug MH17, Auf der Suche nach der Wahrheit, CORRECT!V*, January 2015.

However, the authors provided no evidence that on July 17 Ukrainian jets “hid among passenger planes packed with vacationers”.

As to why the crew fired the missile at MH17, the evidence does not suggest a moment of panic. The crew had waited over an hour for a target to appear, while no attacking aircraft were reported.

The Buk shot at a target which had all the characteristics of an international civilian aircraft, and not an AN-26 or SU. Given that it could have shot at other international passenger airliners, the facts strongly suggest either that the Buk’s crew targeted MH17, or it was so incompetent to thoughtMH17 was a military plane.

But without questioning the crew and the commanders involved in a court of law, we may never know.

Endnotes

¹ “Press-konferentsiya predstavitelei minoborony Rossii po krusheniyu Boeing-777,” *Ministerstva oborony Rossii*, July 21, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSpeo5RcQQo>.

² Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, “Russia this week,” *The Interpreter*, July 25, 2014, <http://www.interpretermag.com/russia-this-week-defense-ministry-claims-about-buk-video-doesnt-add-up/>; and <http://avva.livejournal.com/2787603.html?thread=107583763#t107583763>..

³ “Interview with Gubarev at the crash site,” *Ren TV*, July 18, 2014, <http://youtu.be/0Q8x9FxU4bg>.

⁴ Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, “Terorysty ta viuskovi naimantsi tinichnio planuyvaly terekt proty tsiviknoho litaka Aeroflotu,” (“Terrorists and military mercenaries planned cynical terrorist attack against Aeroflot civil aircraft”), *SBU*, August 7, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntHj124vnIA>

Chapter 10

MH17 – victim of a war crime

On July 17, 2014, from a field in Ukraine, an unmarked anti-aircraft weapon fired a missile at Flight MH17 killing all 298 people on board. This incident is the symbol of Russia's covert war against Ukraine, which under international law is a war crime.

In his first public statement on MH17, on the evening of July 17, Russian President Vladimir Putin, as commander-in-chief of Russia's armed forces, acknowledged no responsibility for his military shooting down the civilian airliner. He said that whatever happened in Ukraine's airspace was Ukraine's responsibility: "the state over whose territory this occurred bears responsibility for this awful tragedy".¹

Despite the unassailable weight of evidence that it was a Russian military weapon that shot down MH17, opinion polls in Russia consistently report that most respondents believe that the Ukrainian military shot down the Malaysian airline. A poll taken in the week after the MH17 tragedy showed that only 1% of those polled believed that the Russian military shot it down, and only 3% said the Donetsk militia. The vast majority said it was shot down by a Ukrainian Buk (46%) or a Ukrainian military jet (36%).²

Another poll taken two months later, September 19-22, 2014, had almost identical results. Only 2% replied that the Russian government was at fault, and only 3% blamed the

Donetsk militia. The rest believed that Ukraine's government or military was responsible (44% and 42% respectively). What was surprising was that 22% blamed the downing of MH17 on the U.S. government.³

President Putin is responsible for conducting a covert war against a neighboring state. Such an operation is a war crime and makes it irrelevant whether the Buk's crew fired the missile at MH17 accidentally or intentionally. Under Article 8 of the UN statute on war crimes⁴, the very presence of a Russian military anti-aircraft weapon in Ukraine is illegal, let alone its lack of identification markings, or its firing of a missile at a civilian airliner. Also under Article 8, the Russian military in attacking and killing innocent civilians had failed to exercise due care in firing a missile at an airliner, with the consequence that they killed 298 civilians who were not directly involved in the hostilities.

President Putin, while committing war crimes, has violated a series of state treaties. By annexing Crimea and occupying parts of eastern Ukraine, he has violated the UN Charter forbidding the occupation of another state's territory. By using violence and economic coercion against Ukraine, he has violated Russia's signature on the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. In it, Russia, together with the United States and the United Kingdom, promised to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and independence and to never use force or economic coercion against it. In return, Ukraine, then in possession of the world's third biggest nuclear arsenal, disarmed itself as a nuclear military power.

Putin also tore up Russia's "Big Treaty" with Ukraine signed in 1997. In "The Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian

Federation,” the two states agreed to “respect each other’s territorial integrity, and confirm the inviolability of the borders existing between them”.

Putin nullified all these treaties when he launched a covert war against Ukraine immediately after February 22, 2014. He took advantage of a political and security power vacuum in Ukraine caused by President Yanukovych’s unexpected abandoning of the presidency and flight to Russia, along with numerous government officials, including the prime minister, the interior minister, and the minister of defense.

Photo 10.1 – Russian troops without identifying insignia on their uniforms occupying Crimea’s parliament



Russia’s conquest of Crimea began four days later, at 0400 on February 26, when Russian troops, without identifying insignia on their uniforms and vehicles, occupied Crimea’s parliament building (Photo 10.1), surrounded Ukraine’s military bases, and seized key transport hubs. To disguise the military takeover as a popular insurrection, the Russian

media portrayed it as armed locals expressing their democratic right to be part of Russia.

At a press conference on March 4, President Putin lied when he said that the troops without identification markings were not Russian, but local insurgents.

[journalist] Mr President, a clarification if I may. The people who were blocking the Ukrainian Army units in Crimea were wearing uniforms that strongly resembled the Russian Army uniform. Were those Russian soldiers, Russian military?

[Putin] Why don't you look at the post-Soviet states? There are many uniforms that are similar. You can go to a store and buy any kind of uniform.

[journalist] But were they Russian soldiers or not?

[Putin] Those were local self-defense units.

Source: “Vladimir Putin answered journalists’ questions on the situation in Ukraine,” *Office of the President of Russia*, March 4, 2014, en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366.

On the first anniversary of the “unification” of Crimea with Russia, Russian TV showed a slick two and half hour documentary, “Crimea: the way home.” This government-funded documentary celebrated Putin giving orders for the Russian military to seize the peninsula, and never mentioned his previous denials that Russian troops were involved in the takeover of Crimea.

Russian special forces in civilian dress and in unidentifiable military fatigues appeared across Eastern Ukraine. On April 13, units of Russian special forces, headed by their commander, Colonel Igor Girkin, aka Strelkov, seized the towns of Kramatorsk and Slovyansk (Photo 10.2), and began an attempt to create the fictional state of New Russia.

Two weeks before Ukraine's presidential elections, the "separatists" consolidated their gains. On May 11, following a similarly fixed referendum in Crimea, they held one-sided referendums declaring these regions to be Russian republics independent of Ukraine.

Photo 10.2 – Russian special forces without identifying insignia occupy Slovyansk on April 14, 2014



On April 14, Russian Spetsnaz also seized neighboring Kramatorsk – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmxBjsU2rig>.

Following the election of Petro Poroshenko as president, on May 25, 2014, Ukraine began a large-scale military push to regain the occupied territories. Russia replied with even larger and better-equipped forces, which gained even more territory.

Putin repeatedly lied about sending Russian troops, "volunteers" and weapons to eastern Ukraine. On June 4, 2014,

before going to France to mark with other heads of state the anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy, Putin told the French radio station *Europe 1* and TV channel *TF-1*:

“There are no armed forces, no Russian ‘instructors’ in the southeastern Ukraine. And there never were any.”

Source: “Vladimir Putin’s interview with *Radio Europe 1* and *TF1 TV channel*,”

Office of the President of Russia, June 4, 2014,

Following Putin’s denial, Russia introduced unmarked Buks, along with unmarked tanks and other heavy weapons into eastern Ukraine. On July 17, there were as many as four Russian Buks in the occupied regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, and more on the border with Russia, protecting hundreds of Russian tanks, and thousands of Russian soldiers and mercenaries inside Ukraine.

The downing of Flight MH17 should have halted the escalation and brought President Putin to his senses. However, despite the additional economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the West, Putin intensified the conflict, with many more people dying after the MH17 tragedy than before.

The “covert war” has killed at least 6,000 and wounded over 14,000 on both sides between the start of the military conflict in mid-April 2014 and February 15, 2015, according to the UN and WHO. The figures included at least 1,756 Ukrainian soldiers killed and 5,505 wounded.⁴

There are no official figures for the number of pro-Russian fighters, former Ukrainian citizens, as opposed to Russian citizens, killed and wounded. The available UN figures for civilians and fighters in the Russian controlled areas are 3,605 killed and 8,492 wounded.⁵ The UN report added that both sides have underestimated their casualty figures:

“Actual fatalities are probably much higher. Military

casualties remain under-reported by the Ukrainian Government and by the armed groups and there is evidence that some killed and wounded members of the armed groups have been taken to the Russian Federation.”

Source: “Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 December 2014 to 15 February 2015,” *Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*, March 2, 2015, <http://is.gd/7tOjLb>.

In addition to the people killed and wounded, over a million people have been displaced from their homes in eastern Ukraine. As many as 2,000 children have been evacuated without their parents.

The German intelligence service, BND, has reported much higher figures than the UN. It has estimated that as many as 50,000 have been killed and wounded on all sides.⁶

The Russian government has not published any casualty figures for its regular soldiers and “volunteers”, so it can maintain President Putin’s fiction that there are no Russian forces in Ukraine. If the Russian military casualties were included, the total figure for the covert war against Ukraine would be nearer the BND’s 50,000 figure.

An unconfirmed estimate gives the total casualties for the Russian military in eastern Ukraine up to March 27, 2015, as 17,050: 7,624 killed, 6,067 wounded, and 3,359 missing.⁷

Russia’s covert action in eastern Ukraine has caused some of the darkest and bloodiest moments in European history since the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. The additional international economic sanctions imposed on Russia have slowed but have not satisfied Putin’s appetite for an imperial victory over Ukraine.

In an ideal world, Putin should be put on trial for war crimes in Ukraine at the International Criminal Court at

The Hague. This would bring some justice to the relatives of the 298 innocent people killed on board flight MH17. Failure to punish Putin licenses him to commit more crimes.

Endnotes

¹ AP, Moscow, July 17, 2014, 6:21 PM ET.

² The poll of 1,500 people was taken from July 18–24, 2014, across six major Russian cities, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nizhniy Novgorod, Rostov-on-Don, Ekaterinburg and Novosibirsk. “Katastrofa ‘Boinga’ pod Donetskem”, *Levada-Tsentr*, July 30, 2014, <http://www.levada.ru/30-07-2014/katastrofa-boinga-pod-donetskem>.

³ “Katastrofa ‘Boinga’ pod Donetskem,” *Levada-Tsentr*, October 10, 2014, <http://www.levada.ru/03-10-2014/katastrofa-boinga-pod-donetskem>.

⁴ Source: “Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine, 1 December 2014 to 15 February 2015,” *Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*, March 2, 2015, <http://is.gd/7tOjLb>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, February 8, 2015.

⁷ “Realnye poteri reguljarnykh voisk RF v voine na Ukraine, sostoyanie na 08.02.2015 goda,” *Blog Olega Yanchuka*, <http://oyblogger.blogspot.co.uk/>.

