

Ukraine Claims to Have Recording of Rebels Saying They Downed Plane

By [Anna Dolgov](#)

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Armed pro-Russian separatists stand at the site of a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 plane crash near the settlement of Grabovo in the Donetsk region, July 17, 2014.

Ukraine's Security Service released a series of what it claims to be intercepted phone conversations on Friday between rebel fighters and their commanders conferring about having shot down a civilian Malaysian airliner.

The passenger aircraft crashed into Ukraine's restive east on Thursday, killing all 298 people on-board. The plane, which had departed from Amsterdam and was en route to Kuala Lumpur, disappeared from radar screens at 5:20pm Moscow time. It had been traveling at an altitude of 10,000 meters.

Rebel leaders and Kiev authorities were quick to point fingers at each other.

In the first of what appear to be excerpts from three separate conversations released by the Security Service, a man identified as Russian separatist commander Igor Bezler reported to his commander that an airplane had been shot down, but few details were available at that point.

In the second conversation — which the Security Service said followed an inspection by separatists of the crash site — a caller identified only as "Major" said that the aircraft was shot down by a Cossack unit stationed at a checkpoint in the village of Chornukhyne, just northeast of the crash site.

The "Major" added that the first "200th" — Russian army slang for a military casualty — "has been found."

"A civilian," he added.

"In short, [expletive], it was 100 percent a civilian craft," the man said.

Asked by a second man in the recording — who was identified only as "Grek" ("Greek") — if many people had been hurt, the "Major" responded with a gloomy expletive, adding: "Debris fell right into backyards."

The "Greek" then asked whether any weapons had been found at the scene.

"Nothing at all," the "Major" responded. "Civilian things, medical stuff, towels, toilet paper."

In the third conversation, a man identified only as a "militant" said the downed aircraft had "turned out to be civilian."

"There is a sea of corpses there — women, children," he said. "Now the Cossacks are looking at all of that."

The militant wondered why a passenger airline would have been in Ukrainian airspace in the first place, saying: "On TV they're saying that it's a Ukraine AN-26, a transport plane. But the writing says Malaysian Airlines. What was it doing over the territory of Ukraine?"

His interlocutor at that point speculated that there may have been spies on board, and then lamented, "Why the hell were they flying? There is a war going on."

The Moscow Times could not independently verify the authenticity of the recording.

See also:

[Putin Wants 'Unbiased Probe' Into Ukraine Plane Crash](https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/07/18/ukraine-claims-to-have-recording-of-rebels-saying-they-downed-plane-a37456)

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