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Ukrainian Pilot Nadezhda Savchenko Speaks From Russian Prison

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Ukrainian helicopter pilot Nadezhda Savchenko, who is presently in Russian custody, said in an interview that the Ukrainian separatists were incapable of shooting down the Malaysian jet destroyed last week over the rebel-held area.

"They have good warriors, but they could not shoot it down," Savchenko said, pro-Kremlin tabloid Lifenews.ru reported Thursday.

The aircraft is believed to have been shot down using a BUK missile system, which can only be operated by highly trained professionals, which are lacking among the separatists, Savchenko said in a video interview from a detention cell.

She did not name her own suspects in the July 17 incident that left 298 people dead, the majority of them Dutch tourists en route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur.

Western countries and official Kiev have said the destroyed Boeing 777 was shot down either by the insurgency raging in eastern Ukraine or by Russian forces accused of backing them.

Moscow and the insurgents have both denied involvement.

Russia, on the other hand, accuses Savchenko of complicity in the death of two reporters who had worked with the Russian state-run broadcaster VGTRK.

The Investigative Committee claims Savchenko was the forward air controller for last month's artillery shelling that killed the journalists.

Her involvement is confirmed by detailed records of her cellphone conversations, the head of the investigation, Alexander Drymanov, was cited by Kommersant as saying Thursday.

Another piece of evidence was a squared map of the shelled area found in her possession, Drymanov said.

Savchenko denied involvement in the Lifenews.ru interview.

"I do not have this kind of training," she said. "I am a pilot for Mi-24 helicopters."

"I have not participated in serious infighting," added Savchenko, who previously served in the international force in Iraq.

Her lawyer Mark Feigin said in a separate interview with Kommersant on Thursday that Russian officials had no legal way of obtaining recordings of her conversations from Ukrainian cellphone operators.

The pilot has previously claimed she was abducted in Ukraine and illegally taken to Russia handcuffed and with a sack over her head.

Savchenko told Lifenews.ru she was ambushed when driving her family car to pick up Ukrainian army soldiers injured in a skirmish with separatists in eastern Ukraine.

But Drymanov reiterated the Investigative Committee's claim that she was detained in the Russian city of Voronezh near the Ukrainian border. He did not say what could have brought Savchenko there.

Savchenko said in the Lifenews.ru interview she had been treated well in prison, but that she was anxious to return to duty.

"I am ready to die for Ukraine if it needs me to," she also said.

"I just want what is happening in Ukraine to end, and my family to be well," Savchenko said.

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