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State Television's Claim of "Proof" in MH17 Case Quickly Debunked as Fake

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Dutch investigators and an Emergencies Ministry member work at the site where the downed Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 crashed, near the village of Hrabove (Grabovo) in Donetsk region Nov. 16.

No sooner did Russia's state-run Channel One broadcast an image it claimed proved a Ukrainian government fighter jet shot down Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 in July, than bloggers and other netizens rushed to debunk the report.

"Channel One has at its disposal what turns out to be a sensational shot, presumably taken by a foreign spy satellite, in the last moments of the Malaysian Boeing's flight over Ukraine," reads a story posted to Channel One's website, alongside a black and white photo apparently depicting a fighter jet shooting down a Boeing.

Bloggers reluctant to take the state-run news outfit at its word immediately emerged from the woodwork. Twitter exploded with claims calling the image's authenticity into question.

Responding to a wave of criticism, Channel One said it had received the image from the

Russian Union of Engineers, which in turn got it from an MIT graduate named George Bilt.

In an interview with BuzzFeed on Saturday, Bilt said he had obtained the image online and sent it to the Russian Union of Engineers to look into its authenticity.

He was shocked, however, to find that the image had been broadcast on television. "These folks are either desperate or totally unprofessional," he said, commenting on the Channel One using the image.

Meanwhile, The Associated Press reported Sunday that it has obtained video that shows how close the burning passenger jet came to hitting village homes and suggests that residents first assumed it was a Ukrainian military plane that had been struck.

The amateur footage, filmed by a resident of Hrabove, shows people reacting in alarm as wreckage blazes only a few meters away from their homes in the afternoon of July 17. The video is perhaps the first taken immediately after the plane came down.

In the video obtained on Sunday by AP, residents of the village of Hrabove can be heard asking about the whereabouts of the pilot. This is significant because multiple Ukrainian military planes had been shot down by this time, and their pilots and crew regularly taken prisoner by rebel forces.

Three days before MH17 was brought down, rebels claimed responsibility for shooting down an Antonov-24 military transport plane.

Workers began to recover debris on Sunday from the MH17 crash site under the supervision of Dutch investigators and OSCE officials. The crash claimed the lives of all 298 travelers and crew members on board. The ultimate cause of the MH17 disaster is the subject of major diplomatic disputes.

(MT and AP)

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