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Russian Military Pilot in Fatal Black Sea Crash Was in 'Full Control of Plane' — Reports

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A crane carries a fragment of a Tu-154 plane engine lifted by divers on a ship just outside Sochi, Russia. **Rossiya One TV Channel photo via AP**

The pilot in charge of the Russian military aircraft which crashed into the Black Sea in December deliberately put the aircraft into a controlled descent just moments after takeoff, the Russian media has reported.

The military Tu-154 airliner crashed moments after taking off from the Russian city of Sochi on Christmas Day, 2016, killing all 92 people on board.

A new report into the crash shows that pilot Roman Volkov put the plane into landing mode just one minute after take-off after reaching an altitude of 250 meters, the Kommersant newspaper reported Tuesday.

Military simulations then show that the Tu-154 flew parallel to the water for a full ten

seconds before colliding with the sea.

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Experts told Kommersant that the crew could have become disorientated during take-off, which took place under darkness.

Unable to see landmarks or the horizon, Volkov may have decided to rely on his own intuition and experience to pilot the plane, rather than rely on the aircraft's instruments, the newspaper reported. The reflections of stars in the sea may also have added to the pilot's disorientation.

The Ministry of Defense is currently investigating Volkov's medical records, as well as interviewing his former flight instructors, Kommersant reported. It is also investigating whether the crew was properly rested before the flight.

The Tu-154 was carrying military personnel, journalists, and musicians due to perform a New Year's concert for troops at the Russian air base in Syria's Latakia province. Among the victims were 64 members of the iconic military choir, The Alexandrov Ensemble, and prominent Russian humanitarian Elizaveta Glinka.

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