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Defense Lawyers Allowed to Examine MH17 Wreckage

By AFP

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Prosecutors and international investigators say flight MH17 was hit by a Russian-made BUK surface-to-air missile, killing all 298 people on board. **Alexander Ermochenko / Zuma / TASS**

Defense lawyers for a Russian suspect on trial over the downing of flight MH17 will be allowed to inspect the partially recovered wreck of the passenger jet, Dutch judges ruled Friday.

The judges granted the request after lawyers for Oleg Pulatov, the only suspect out of four with legal representation, said they wanted to probe alternative theories for the 2014 shooting down of the Malaysia Airlines plane.

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"The defense has an interest in being able to test the scenario chosen by the Public Prosecution Service in the indictment that MH17 was shot down by a BUK," Judge Hendrik Steenhuis said.

He ordered prosecutors to "give the defense the opportunity to visit the reconstruction of MH17... with an expert they have chosen."

Investigators in 2015 painstakingly put together a partial reconstruction at a Dutch military air base, using parts of the plane's wreckage recovered from war-torn eastern Ukraine.

Pulatov's lawyers mentioned "a number of people who said the damage pattern of MH17 shows traces of one of more other weapons," Steenhuis said.

Russian officials have previously publicly supported similar theories that a Ukrainian jet downed MH17 in the immediate aftermath of the crash.

Steenhuis said once the wreck has been examined the expert would then be allowed to submit a report which could be scrutinized by Dutch military aviation experts and prosecutors.

Prosecutors last month addressed the fighter jet theory, saying investigators examined radar data that showed no military aircraft in the area at the time.

They also said Russia had backed away from the theory after admitting that radar details appearing to show other planes nearby were given in error.

Prosecutors argue the four men on trial were instrumental in bringing a BUK surface-to-air missile system to Ukraine from its original base in Russia — even if they did not pull the trigger.

Pulatov together with fellow Russians Igor Girkin and Sergei Dubinsky and Ukrainian citizen Leonid Kharchenko have been charged by Dutch prosecutors with murder and causing the crash.

The case was adjourned for the summer and will resume on August 31.

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