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Russian Soldier Jailed for Accidentally Shooting Down Friendly Helicopter

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A Russian Mi-8 helicopter. **Vitaly V. Kuzmin (CC BY-SA 4.0)**

A Russian air defense officer was sentenced to nearly three years in prison for mistakenly shooting down a Russian helicopter after mistaking it for a Ukrainian drone, the Kommersant business daily reported Wednesday, citing court documents.

Three crew members of the Mi-8 helicopter were killed after a Russian anti-air missile system shot it down down over annexed Crimea on Oct. 18, 2023.

Captain Igor Pashkov, an assistant air defense officer on duty at the time, turned himself in to the authorities last May, "admitting that he could have made a fatal mistake," Kommersant reported.

According to the court documents, an unidentified combat crew chief reported a "low-flying, low-speed aerial target" to Pashkov.

"The crew chief later clarified that the target was a helicopter flying with the lights on, but ...

Pashkov did not believe the follow-up reports and a check showed there were no 'friendly aircraft' in the vicinity," Kommersant said.

"Two minutes after the initial message, a missile fired from the Tor-M2DT anti-aircraft missile system destroyed the target," it added without clarifying whether Pashkov received or issued the orders to shoot it down.

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A military court in the Crimean city of Sevastopol found Pashkov guilty of negligence and sentenced him to three years in a penal colony.

An appeals court in the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don later reduced that sentence by two months, Kommersant reported.

Pashkov pleaded guilty to the charges. He faced up to seven years in prison, but the judge determined that his admission of guilt, having a dependent son with a disability and status as a combat veteran with state awards all served as mitigating circumstances.

Pashkov was also ordered to pay Russia's Defense Ministry 5 million rubles ($48,800) in compensation for property damage and 1 million rubles ($9,700) to each of the crew members' widows.

Russia's Defense Ministry initially sought 204 million rubles ($1.9 million) for the destroyed helicopter, which crashed into the Black Sea.

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