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Military Court Admits Ukrainian Missile Strike Sank Moskva Cruiser

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Sergei Malgavko/TASS

A Moscow military court has for the first time acknowledged that 20 sailors were killed in a Ukrainian missile strike on the flagship of the Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet nearly four years ago.

The sinking of the cruiser Moskva in April 2022 off the coast of southern Ukraine came as a major embarrassment for the Russian military, which initially said the warship sank in stormy seas as it was being towed to port for repairs following a fire caused by a munitions explosion.

On Thursday, Moscow's Second Western District Military Court sentenced Ukrainian Navy brigade commander Andriy Shubin to life in prison in absentia after he was found guilty of terrorism related to the sinking of the Moskva and another Russian warship, the exiled news outlet Mediazona reported.

The court said two Ukrainian missiles struck the Moskva, sparking a fire on board the ship

and causing smoke to fill its interior compartments. Ukraine previously said it used two Neptune anti-ship missiles to strike the vessel.

It was the first time Russia acknowledged a missile strike was to blame for the sinking.

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In a press release, which was later taken down from the court's website, 20 sailors aboard the Moskva were confirmed as having been killed as a result of the attack, while another 24 sustained various injuries. Eight sailors remain missing, the press release said.

"These losses occurred during a six-hour 'struggle for ship survivability'," a screenshot of the press release published by Mediazona reads.

Russia's Defense Ministry has officially acknowledged only a single death in the sinking of the Moskva, adding that 27 sailors went missing in the disaster. A Russian-installed court in annexed Crimea declared 17 of the missing crew dead in a November 2022 ruling.

A memorial to 19 sailors who lost their lives in the sinking of the Moskva was unveiled in 2024 at the headquarters of the Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, Crimea.

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