

French prosecutor says copilot deliberately crashed Germanwings flight

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At a press conference yesterday in Marseille, the French public prosecutor charged with investigating Tuesday's crash of a Germanwings Airbus A320 said that the German copilot, Andreas Lubitz, had deliberately flown the plane into a mountain in the Alps.

Based on the recordings from a cockpit voice recorder, prosecutor Brice Robin described the final horrific minutes inside the plane just prior to its collision with a mountain, killing all 150 passengers and crew.

According to Robin, the initial 20 minutes of the flight after its takeoff from Barcelona were normal, with friendly exchanges recorded between the pilot and his first officer. Then, after the pilot left the cockpit, presumably to go to the restroom, Lubitz put the plane into a steep dive and refused to allow the senior pilot back into the cockpit.

Transponder data indicates that Lubitz programmed the plane to descend from 38,000 feet to 96 feet, the lowest level. Audio recordings reportedly show that he was breathing normally throughout the period prior to the crash, though he did not say anything or respond to requests from air traffic controllers.

The evening before Robin's statements, a source close to investigators working on the voice recorder told the *New York Times*, "The guy outside [the cockpit] is knocking lightly on the door, and there is no answer. And then he hits the door stronger, and no answer. There is never an answer." At the end, the source said, "You can hear he is trying to smash the door down."

Following the terror attacks of 9/11, the cockpits of all of the planes flown by major international carriers were reinforced and equipped with locking devices to prevent any non-crewmembers from entering the cabin.

Crewmembers have a special code with which they can gain access to the cockpit in the event of an emergency. However, the pilot and copilot also have a manual override, with which they can block all entry into the cabin. There is also a means to bypass this override, but it is unclear whether the pilot attempted to do so.

It appears that Lubitz prevented the pilot from regaining entry to the cockpit and then set the plane on its downward plunge. The Airbus A320 has fly-by-wire technology, meaning that the controls are largely computer-driven, but the drastic change of flight course by the Airbus was only possible by manual means, Robin said.

The French prosecutor accused the copilot of "wanting to destroy the plane." At the same time, he said, there was no evidence of any terrorist motivation.

At a press conference in Germany at 14:30 Carsten Spohr, the CEO of Lufthansa, the parent airline of Germanwings, reiterated the statements made by the French prosecutor and also declared that there was no evidence of a terrorist motive for the copilot's behavior. Spohr also gave a few details into the background of Lubitz.

The investigation is still ongoing, and more information will no doubt emerge in the coming days. Researchers are still trying to locate the memory card of the flight's second black box that could throw additional light on the crash, and a thorough investigation of the flight's voice recorder will still take some time.

Lubitz, aged 27, had been flying for Germanwings since September 2013 and had clocked up a total of 630 hours in the air. He had carried out normal training to be a pilot, although he broke off his training briefly 6 years ago. Some newspapers have speculated that he

may have suffered from some form of “burnout” during this period.

According to acquaintances interviewed by the press, however, Lubitz appeared to be a stable man who was carrying a job he had long dreamed of doing.

At this point, there are few indications of what would have driven Lubitz to such a horrific act. However, presuming that the account indicated by the available evidence is correct, the act of homicidal suicide/murder can only be understood as the product of a pathological level of social alienation. Such actions do not occur in a healthy society.



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