

Airplane debris may be from missing flight MH370

Will Morrow
1 August 2015

Malaysian Deputy Transport Minister Abdul Aziz Kaprawi yesterday said that airplane debris discovered on Wednesday in the western Indian Ocean belongs to a Boeing 777. This is the same aircraft type as Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, which disappeared en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing nearly 17 months ago, on March 8, 2014, with 239 people aboard.

The debris has been identified as a flaperon, part of a plane's wing, which helps to control speed and roll. A beach cleaner found the part after it had washed ashore on the northern coast of Réunion, a French island with a population of 850,000, located east of Madagascar and south of Mauritius.

If confirmed to be from a Boeing 777, the flaperon's discovery would increase the likelihood that the wing part comes from MH370, because no other 777s have been reported as crashing or losing a wing in the Indian Ocean.

The wing-flap is being flown to France today to a military laboratory in Toulouse, which also analysed debris from other plane disasters, including the Air France flight that crashed into the Atlantic in 2009. Representatives from Boeing, the Malaysian government and the US National Transport Safety Board are heading to France to take part in the investigations.

Work to determine whether the flaperon belongs to flight MH370 will reportedly not begin until midweek, once a French investigative judge has met with Malaysian and French transport representatives and Malaysian judicial authorities. If no specific markings are found on the debris, the team can match any structural imperfections with the plane's maintenance records.

If the debris is found to belong to MH370, it would represent the first piece of evidence that the flight did

crash somewhere in the Indian Ocean. However, experts have noted that it would still provide no information as to where MH370 actually crashed. Twelve crew members, and 227 passengers, mostly Chinese citizens, were killed.

Réunion is roughly 3,700 km from the vast stretch of seabed in the southern Indian Ocean where international search efforts for MH370 have focussed. This is reportedly consistent, based on ocean current models, with the suspected crash area, but it would be near impossible to trace backwards the path of the debris in order to narrow the possible site. "The ocean is so chaotic, it would be very hard to track back where this particular piece was 16 months ago," oceanographer Dr Erik van Sebille of London's Imperial College told NEWS.com.au.

Locating the plane's main fuselage is fundamental to determining what took place during the flight, as it probably holds the aircraft's black box, which records live flight data, including audio recordings from inside the cockpit.

The flaperon may provide some insight into how the plane crashed. Xavier Tytelman, a French aviation safety expert, told NEWS.com.au that based on any torn metal, "you can tell whether a crash was more horizontal or vertical ... You can extrapolate a lot." Tytelman said that barnacles encrusting the wing, along with any marine microscopic life inside the debris, may indicate the wing's ocean path.

Jean-Paul Troadec, who led the investigations into the 2009 Air France crash, told the news outlet that the information gleaned from the flaperon "will be quite limited to the way this part has broken from the aircraft. Was it during an explosion, was it when the aircraft crashed into the sea?"

The circumstances of MH370's disappearance are

still shrouded in mystery. The plane's contact with air traffic control was lost after its civilian transponder—located between the two pilots—was disabled, either consciously or due to a malfunction, somewhere over the South China Sea. According to Malaysian military radar, the plane then inexplicably diverted westward from its path, taking it across the Malaysian peninsula.

Data from the British international satellite company Immarsat allegedly showed the plane continuing to travel for seven hours, before it likely ran out of fuel and crashed somewhere in the Indian Ocean.

According to the official story, none of the vast spying satellite networks, above all those of the United States military and its allies in the region, including Australia, were focussed on the area traversed by MH370 on that day.

This is despite south-east Asia becoming one of the world's most highly surveilled regions by the US military, as part of Washington's preparations for war with China. Throughout the search efforts for MH370, all the regional governments have been reluctant to release any imagery that would reveal their military radar capabilities to their rivals.

Enormous commercial interests are also at stake in the investigation, including those of Boeing, the plane manufacturer, and the Malaysian government, which runs the state-owned Malaysia Airlines.

So far, only one family has reached an out-of-court settlement with Malaysia Airlines, according to CNN. Jiang Hui, a relative of an MH370 passenger, told the news agency that most families had not yet made their compensation claims. "We want the truth, without truth there is no party liable, without party liable, you wouldn't know how much responsibility should be taken," he said.

Li Zhen, whose husband was on the plane, told Reuters: "Regardless of whether our loved ones return or not, I will definitely sue Malaysian Airlines ... they have put us through so much pain and suffering, they must be held responsible."

Joseph Wheeler, from the Australian firm Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, told NBC that if Boeing were found by expert evidence to be responsible for the accident, families could sue the aircraft manufacturer.

CNN reported on Thursday that a confidential US intelligence report, prepared "months" ago, said

MH370 was probably deliberately crashed by someone inside the plane's cockpit. The report has not been released, however, and the CNN story is based entirely on comments from two unnamed US officials.

Little media press coverage has been given to the fact that a serious technical flaw in Boeing 777s was reported during 2013. The defect could lead to cracking in the fuselage skin, beneath the plane's satellite antenna, and cause cabin decompression, rendering the cabin crew and passengers unconscious.

Malaysian authorities revealed in an interim report published in March this year that the battery powering the underwater locator beacon on the MH370 plane expired in December 2012, with no evidence that it was replaced.

These reports point to the possible impact of the sacrifice of safety and search-and-rescue capabilities motivated by profit-seeking and cost-cutting in the airline industry.



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