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Interview by Chief of Urals Transport Investigations Directorate Dmitry Putintsev to Rossiyskaya Gazeta



Investigators debriefed An-2

Simultaneously with searches for An-2 which disappeared a month ago in Serov, inquiry is ongoing into this emergency situation. The criminal case is investigated by Urals Transport Investigations Directorate of Russia's Investigative Committee. RG Correspondent has met with the Head of the Directorate Dmitry Putintsev.



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Mr Putintsev, a criminal case was initiated over missing An-2. What is the progress of investigation?

Dmitry Putintsev: Immediately after disappearance of An-2 a search and investigation group of the most experienced investigators and criminologists was set up. At first there were 12 people working at the incident scene. Now 4 officials are dealing directly with the case.

At the first stage we carried out all necessary search and investigation operations: examined 5 incident scenes, carried out 8 searches, seized real evidence and technical documentation, questioned 127 witnesses, including relatives of those aboard. By the way, they were recognized victims. In addition, we obtained a detailed list of mobile calls. Now it is impossible to find out what the missing were talking about on their mobile phones. But we found when, to whom and who of them had called.

At present we are running a number of examinations. At the same time investigators are sending requests to various agencies and organizations to find out some details, they are studying the seized documents and analyzing the collected information.

There aren't any difficulties in investigation. I should say that over 5 years the Urals Transport Investigations Directorate exists the officials have got a lot of experience in such cases: in all we have investigated about 20 tragedies, one of them – Boeing crash in Perm.

Have investigators managed to reconstruct what happened in Serov?



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Dmitry Putintsev: Yes, we have a certain impression of the situation. However, in the interests of investigation we can't reveal details of disappearance of people and plane.

You mean you can't even say whether the An-2 pilot constantly ran commercial flights or it was a single instance?

Dmitry Putintsev: No, we can't for the time being. The same way you can't definitely say that the missing passengers paid for the flight.

None the less, though An-2 was used to monitor forest fires in Sverdlovsk Region, that time it took off not to work?

Dmitry Putintsev: No, the missing aircraft hadn't got any official need to take off.

OK, then what main versions of the tragedy are being considered?

Dmitry Putintsev: At first we had 4 standard versions: technical failure, violation by a pilot safety rules for traffic and use of aircraft, hijacking and unfavorable weather conditions.



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We have found that the weather that day was good. And the hijack version was not confirmed by search and investigation operations. There is no evidence as well that the plane could have been brought down by militants. So now we have only two versions: a pilot's mistake during a flight or malfunction of the aircraft.

How professional was the pilot?

Dmitry Putintsev: It has been found that he was an experienced pilot. He had been flying An-2 for a long time and knew much about this type of aircraft. In addition, he had a flight permission and had taken the necessary brief.

Well, then what state was An-2 in?

Dmitry Putintsev: The aircraft was 25. Over these years it had been completely repaired 4 times, last time in 2010. Moreover, the plane regularly underwent planned maintenance checkups, last time – this March. As we have found out An-2 had not been beyond its service life and could have been used during 3 more years.

Is it true that An-2 planes are prone to accidents?

Dmitry Putintsev: Hardly, they are considered the safest. In fact they are gliders which in case of malfunctioning smoothly go down to earth. Over 5 years in the Urals Federal District, Perm Territory and Orenburg Region there hasn't ever been An-2 crash. This is the first one.



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Do you think it has crashed?

Dmitry Putintsev: Maybe. Though it is possible that while gliding it landed safely.

If it had crashed, it would most likely have caught fire thus giving away its location?

Dmitry Putintsev: In our practice we had a situation when a cargo An-24 filled with 15 tons of fuel crashed to the ground, but did not catch fire. The soil absorbed the spilt fuel.

You have extensive experience of investigating aircraft incidents. Can you remember any situation when a plane got missed, but then it turned out OK?

Dmitry Putintsev: Such incidents never turn out OK. Passengers have small chances to survive a crash. Pilots die in some 95% of crashes. But even if the passengers had survived, they may have suffered grave injuries.

As for An-2, I think we will find it anyway. We had a similar situation in our practice: one day in winter a helicopter disappeared in North Urals. Then the search territory was also very large. It was searched many times, but the helicopter was nowhere to be found. It was discovered only 8 months later, when snow in tundra began to melt. It turned out that all this time the helicopter was not far



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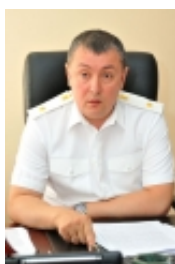
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from the airfield. When it fell the snow went up and then covered the helicopter. It is possible that An-2 is hidden by trees. As we all know, in the north of the region there are high trees growing very close to each other and covering up the earth with their crowns. Most likely, we can find the plane in autumn, when the leaves start falling.

How long will investigation take, if you can't find An-2?

Dmitry Putintsev: If the plane is not discovered, the investigation will be suspended and resumed as soon as new circumstances are revealed. However, we can say for sure, that investigators will continue working for at least 4 more months. We have to carry out all necessary investigation operations.

Изображения



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