

(c) Moscow "World Service" in English 1800 gmt 12 Nov 86

Excerpts from report:

The circumstances of the crash of the plane with President Machel of Mozambique on board was the main question at the briefing in the press centre of the Soviet Foreign Ministry addressed by a Deputy Minister for Civil Aviation of the USSR, Ivan Vasin [Voice to translation]:

In line with the rules of the International Civil Aviation Organisation, South Africa has been made responsible for investigating the circumstances of the crash, as the country where it occurred. But the South African authorities have in fact been blocking the investigation. They have been unwilling to decode the recordings made by onboard instruments kept in the so-called black box, which is in South Africa. An understanding to decode the recordings was reached between the Soviet Union, Mozambique and South Africa. South Africa has also been avading other (?co-operations) envisaged by ICAO rules to investigate the circumstances of the crash.

Rumours and speculations are being spread to distort the essence of the matter. Ivan Vasin said that all the crewmen were skilled specialists with a vast experience of flights on international routes in any weather conditions. . . The aircraft had navigational equipment that fully met the present-day international standards of flight safety. Not a single case of malfunctioning had been recorded during the flight which is confirmed by the crew's radio contacts with ground control and by testimony of the survived air mechanic, Vladimir Novoselov. A medical commission has refuted allegations that the crew were drunk as an invention, Ivan Vasin said.

Ivan Vasin and the executive secretary of the Soviet commission for ICO affairs, Boris (?Ryzhenkov), drew the journalists' attention to the fact that the plane had been strictly on route. At 100 km from Maputo it made a 35 degree turn and flew towards South Africa's border. Maputo's ground controllers were unable to follow the flight since they did not have radars. As for South Africa's service, judging by radio contacts, they controlled [sic: i.e. monitored] the presidential plane's flight continually, but no report of a change of the plane's course came to Maputo from South Africa. The crew altered course so sharply only as a result of changed readings given by the navigational instruments fixed for Maputo airport frequency, Ivan Vasin and Boris (?Ryzhenkov) believe. This became possible under condition that the magnetic field was changed and a new powerful radio beacon appeared . . . that signalled a false course. The plane's manoeuvring was also indicative. The crew prepared to land in Maputo but there was no need to move so far away from the landing site.

Ivan Vasin and Boris Ryzhenkov then focused on the fact that South African military specialists arrived at the scene of the plane's fall 15 minutes after the crash. Such are indisputable facts. The final conclusions can be made only after decoding the black box readings, and decoding has not yet started through South Africa's fault. . .

[Note: A Tass report of the press briefing (in English 1534 gmt 12 Nov 86) said Vasin had rejected as "malicious concoctions" the South African authorities' allegation that the crew of the airliner had been drunk. The flight to Maputo had proceeded normally and the crew had had "no complaints about health". The TU-134 airliner had been built "late in 1980", Tass said.]