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'Russian cruiser fired rocket that sank the Kursk'

Russia's domestic security agency is reported to have concluded that the nuclear submarine Kursk was hit by a rocket fired by a Russian cruiser during military exercises.

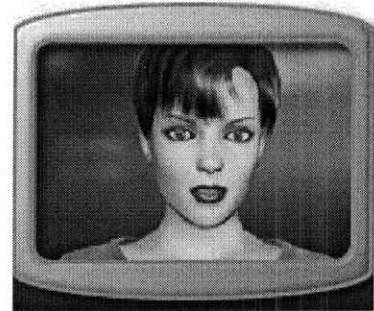
The Berliner Zeitung, citing information obtained by its Moscow correspondent, said in a story that the special commission's report had been presented to Russian President Vladimir Putin on August 31.

The accident that sank the Kursk, killing all 118 on board, occurred on August 12 during exercises in the Barents Sea. Russian officials have speculated that the Kursk collided with another vessel, tearing a large hole in its front end, while US officials say they believe a torpedo misfire caused the tragedy.

The newspaper report said that the Kursk was hit by a new anti-submarine rocket fired by the Russian nuclear-powered cruiser Peter the Great, which was participating in the manoeuvres.

It said the Granite rocket, which is armed with a new target-seeking warhead, dived underwater about 12 miles after being fired. Immediately afterwards, the cruiser registered two underwater explosions, both of which could be seen from the bridge of the ship.

It was later determined that the position of the Kursk and the spot where the rocket went underwater were within 400 metres of each other. The report does not say whether the rocket itself or systems intended to differentiate between friend and foe malfunctioned, the newspaper said.



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The commission was headed by Nikolai Patrushev, director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), the main successor to the Soviet KGB. President Putin intends to discuss the report with senior military staff upon returning from the UN summit in New York, the Berliner Zeitung said.

An FSB spokesman in Moscow denied knowledge of any such report when contacted by newspaper.

Peter the Great had fired the rockets daily since August 2 as part of the Northern Fleet's exercise, which was to practise defending against a nuclear attack on Russia.

On August 12, the manoeuvres were to test the deployment of the rocket "under maximum realistic conditions" and at relative short distances, the Berliner Zeitung report said.

Last updated: 22:21 Thursday 7th September 2000.

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