

Reconstructing El Al Flight 1862: Why I Built a Primary-Source Archive About the Amsterdam Bijlmer Crash

On 4 October 1992, El Al Flight 1862 — a Boeing 747 cargo aircraft — crashed into the Bijlmermeer district of Amsterdam after losing both engines mounted on the right wing. The disaster killed crew members and residents on the ground, devastated an entire community, and left behind one of the most emotionally charged aviation debates in modern Dutch history.

More than three decades later, the crash is still surrounded by suspicion, unresolved emotions, political accusations, media controversies, and conspiracy theories.

That is precisely why I felt compelled to build the website:

www.elal1862accidentinvestigation.nl

The purpose of the website is not to “win” an argument. Its purpose is to return the discussion to something increasingly rare in modern information culture: verifiable primary-source evidence.

For many years, public understanding of the Bijlmer disaster has been shaped not only by the official investigation, but also by documentaries, dramatizations, political debates, activist narratives, television productions, journalistic interpretations, and increasingly emotional public memory. Over time, many of these narratives became detached from the original technical evidence.

In my opinion, the public view of reality surrounding the crash gradually became clouded.

The website was therefore designed as a large-scale open-source archive and analytical platform where readers can independently examine original materials related to the investigation of El Al Flight 1862.

It contains:

- original investigation documents,
- technical analyses,
- radar and DFDR discussions,
- explanations of ICAO Annex 13 procedures,
- historical timelines,
- media analyses,
- archival references,
- and detailed reconstructions based on original evidence.

The aim is simple: anyone should now be able to conduct their own fact-checking.

From Accident Investigator to Public Archivist

My own involvement in the investigation was not academic or retrospective. I participated directly in the original ICAO Annex 13 safety investigation after the crash.

At the time, I was part of the Dutch civil aviation authority and worked within the official investigation structure under investigator-in-charge mr. ir. H.N. Wolleswinkel.

Within the investigation team, I was involved in:

- wreckage examination,
- engine and pylon analysis,
- interpretation of DFDR (Digital Flight Data Recorder) data,
- technical subgroup coordination,
- and drafting parts of the final accident report.

Like many accident investigators involved in major disasters, I later also had to defend aspects of the investigation publicly and politically, including during the Dutch parliamentary inquiry into the Bijlmer disaster. In that sense, the experience resembles — although in a completely different context — the public scrutiny faced by figures such as Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger after the Hudson River accident.

The difference is that the El Al 1862 debate never truly ended.

The Persistence of Narratives

One of the most striking aspects of the Bijlmer disaster is not only the crash itself, but the extraordinary persistence of narratives that survived for more than thirty years.

These include:

- theories about a “secret extra circuit” over Amsterdam,
- hidden cargo,
- deliberate concealment of information,
- dangerous depleted uranium contamination,
- missing recorders,
- intelligence agency involvement,
- and accusations that the official investigation knowingly concealed the truth.

Many of these ideas became culturally stronger than the technical evidence itself.

The problem is not that questions were asked. Critical journalism and public scrutiny are essential in any democracy. The real problem begins when narratives become resistant to correction — even when primary evidence becomes available.

That process is not unique to the Bijlmer disaster. It reflects a broader modern phenomenon:

- how media narratives evolve,
- how confirmation bias develops,
- how distrust amplifies itself,
- and how emotionally compelling stories can eventually overshadow technical reality.

The website therefore goes far beyond aviation alone.

It is also about:

- investigative journalism,
- media ethics,
- political pressure,
- public distrust,
- narrative formation,
- and the long-term survival of conspiracy thinking.

Why Primary Sources Matter

One of the central ideas behind the project is that modern societies increasingly discuss events through layers of interpretation rather than through original evidence.

People often quote:

- journalists quoting witnesses,
- documentaries quoting journalists,
- politicians quoting media reports,
- or social media repeating fragments detached from their source context.

Eventually, the original evidence disappears beneath decades of retelling.

That is why the website places enormous emphasis on primary documentation and traceability. Readers are encouraged not to trust conclusions blindly — including mine — but to examine the underlying materials themselves.

In the end, facts alone do not remove emotion. They do not erase grief, trauma, anger, or distrust. But verifiable facts do provide a common starting point for honest discussion.

An Invitation to Re-Examine the Disaster

The website is intended for:

- relatives and survivors,
- students,

- teachers,
- journalists,
- researchers,
- aviation professionals,
- historians,
- and anyone interested in understanding how truth, media, and public perception interact after major disasters.

A book project is currently in development based on first-class primary-source material, including surviving archives and documentation from members of the original investigation team and the archives of investigator-in-charge mr. ir. H.N. Wolleswinkel.

The intention is not to silence debate, but to improve its foundation.

The Bijlmer disaster deserves careful reconstruction, not endless mythology.

More than thirty years later, the invitation remains open:

Go back to the sources.

Examine the evidence.

Study the documents.

Challenge assumptions.

And decide for yourself.