

El Al 1862: From Fact to Myth

The table below sets out how several journalistic narratives surrounding the Bijlmer air disaster came into being and later continued to live on as persistent “mysteries.” The recurring pattern is that there was usually a real fact, an observation, or an uncertainty first, after which a journalistic interpretation attached a much broader meaning to it. This overview is based on Henk Pruiss’s knowledge bank, version 1 September 2026.

Original fact / observation	First reasonable question	Journalistic interpretation / misinterpretation	How the narrative developed	Later enduring “mystery”	Current status according to the knowledge bank
In the first days, the route was not yet clear to everyone. There were eyewitnesses, preliminary maps, and different time references.	What exact route did the aircraft fly after the engine separation?	Differences between eyewitness accounts, sketches, radar, and timestamps were interpreted as contradictions.	From those differences arose the idea that the official route could not be correct.	A different route / an extra or third circuit.	Radar, ATC, and DFDR data made the route highly reconstructable already in the first week. By 8 October, the route had been determined from three independent radar sources to within about 100 meters; from 7 October onward, the DFDR was also available. According to the knowledge bank, there is no relevant technical uncertainty about the existence of an extra circuit.
The Hollandse Brug was used as a recognizable geographical reference point.	Did the engines fall off before or after the Hollandse Brug?	An incorrectly plotted bridge position and differing time references made comparison with eyewitnesses confusing.	The map discussion became part of the wider doubt about the entire official reconstruction.	The engines must have separated somewhere else than the investigators claimed.	The knowledge bank links DFDR, radar, and time synchronization to an engine separation around 17:27:30 UTC near the Hollandse Brug and considers the Air Accident Investigation Board reconstruction to be correct.
The cockpit voice recorder was never recovered.	Why was the CVR never found?	The missing recorder became linked to missing data and possible concealment.	Because a missing object can never explain what happened to it, it left room for ever-new scenarios.	The CVR was found and then removed or deliberately made to disappear.	The missing CVR is a genuine open point. The knowledge bank explicitly warns: its absence is not evidence of theft or a cover-up.
People in white or bluish protective clothing were seen at and around the crash site.	Who were these people and why were they wearing protective clothing?	Protective clothing later came to signify mysterious, possibly Israeli individuals who had come to remove something.	The clothing became a visual symbol of the presence of unknown outsiders.	“Men in white suits,” often later linked to Mossad or secret recovery operations.	The knowledge bank includes a separate analysis of white/blue suits and links protective clothing partly to protection against blood-borne pathogens. The observation of protective clothing is not the same as proof of a secret Israeli operation.
The Boeing 747 contained depleted uranium counterweights.	Why was radioactive material present in a passenger/cargo aircraft, and did it pose a danger?	The word “uranium” was easily associated with nuclear cargo, radiation, and secret transport.	Its structural use became blurred in public perception with questions about cargo and health.	Secret nuclear cargo / uranium as the cause of illness.	The uranium was not cargo, but structural balancing material. Its presence was already technically discussed and examined in Hangar 8 on 7 October.
Not all cargo information was immediately clear and accessible to the public. Hazardous materials were being transported.	What exactly was on board, and why did information emerge only gradually?	Incomplete public information became associated with the idea that an important part of the cargo was being concealed.	Every later-discovered document or substance could then be presented as a new “revelation.”	Secret, highly dangerous, or military cargo.	The knowledge bank stresses the distinction between the fact that hazardous materials were carried and the much broader conclusion that there was secret weapons-related cargo. Primary cargo and NOTOC documents should remain leading sources.
On 16 September 1993, the newspaper Trouw published an article describing the aircraft as a “flying chemical factory.”	Which hazardous substances had been on board?	The presence of various chemicals was brought together under a very strong metaphor.	The phrase suggested more than separately and correctly declared dangerous goods: the aircraft was portrayed as an exceptional chemical danger.	The Boeing was a “flying chemical factory” whose danger had been concealed.	The knowledge bank explicitly identifies this publication as a case of framing that amplified fear, health concerns, and political escalation.
240 kg of DMMP was carried. In some chemical processes, DMMP can serve as a precursor.	What was DMMP, and what was it intended for?	Journalistic emphasis shifted to “raw material for poison gas / nerve gas.”	The legally transported dual-use substance became linked in the public imagination to sarin and then to secret Israeli weapons production.	El Al 1862 was carrying material for sarin / nerve gas.	The knowledge bank makes the distinction explicit: DMMP being on board is a fact; DMMP is not sarin; a specific destination for sarin production requires separate proof. According to the documents, the transport was legal and declared.

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Photographs of the aircraft taken before the fatal flight showed engine 3 at a certain angle.	Was engine 3 hanging differently from engine 4?	A photographic impression became linked to the possibility that the engine attachment had already been defective before departure.	This led to the chain of reasoning: engine appears crooked → attachment was broken → the aircraft was not airworthy.	The hanging engine: EI Al 1862 should never have departed.	The photographic issue was a legitimate technical question, but it did not provide proof that the attachment had already failed before departure. That scenario was not technically confirmed.
There were real health complaints among residents and emergency responders.	What made people ill, and could this be connected to the crash?	Health complaints were increasingly linked to unknown or supposedly secret cargo.	Uranium, chemicals, DMMP, white suits, and missing information began reinforcing one another within the narrative.	There must have been an unknown toxic substance on board that explains the illnesses.	The existence of complaints is a fact; the question of causality is separate. The knowledge bank warns against conflating observation, hypothesis, and causal conclusion.
Government communication was, at several moments, slow, incomplete, or confusing.	Why did information sometimes come late, and why were answers not always consistent?	Communication failures were interpreted as signs that information was being deliberately withheld.	Subsequent uncertainties were no longer judged separately, but taken as confirmation of the same pattern.	“No conspiracy, but definitely a cover-up.”	The knowledge bank treats the “cover-up” as a media frame / narrative, not as a technically established fact. The frame was also explicitly revived again in 2022.
Journalists, politicians, and residents’ groups exchanged information and responded to each other’s findings.	How could new questions be pursued politically?	Publications led to parliamentary questions; parliamentary questions made the publications more newsworthy in turn.	A self-reinforcing cycle emerged involving journalism, politics, and public anxiety.	The whole picture increasingly seemed to form one coherent hidden story.	The knowledge bank calls this mutual legitimization: media attention increased political attention, and vice versa. This is a communication dynamic, not proof of an organized conspiracy.

What this table mainly shows

The development often followed the same pattern: **fact** → **question** → **interpretation** → **political/media attention** → **new “evidence”** → **narrative** → **mystery**. The original fact was often not invented at all. There *was* a CVR that was not found. There *were* people in protective suits. There *was* depleted uranium in the Boeing. DMMP was transported. There *were* health complaints. There *were* problems in information provision. And there *were* photographs that raised questions about the position of one engine.

The crucial step always comes afterwards: **what meaning was assigned to that fact?** The knowledge bank therefore works with a methodological distinction between observation, reconstruction, interpretation, and hypothesis. That is exactly what is needed to understand how journalistic narratives could grow into persistent mysteries.

The sharpest conclusion is therefore this: **most Bijlmer “mysteries” did not arise because there were no facts, but because real facts and uncertainties were given a meaning that went beyond the available evidence.** Separate interpretations were then connected to one another. An unclear route, a missing recorder, hazardous substances, uranium, health complaints, and people in protective clothing thus stopped functioning as separate research questions and instead became mutually reinforcing parts of one larger story.

That also explains why some stories proved so hard to dislodge: once an overarching narrative exists, every new puzzle is more easily interpreted as confirmation of that narrative than as a separate issue that must be judged on its own evidence.