

SUMMARIZED MINUTES
Vietnam War Working Group Technical Talks
U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs (USRJC)
March 3, 2020
Arlington, Virginia, USA

U.S. Side Participants

- Mr. Kelly McKeague
U.S. Side Commissioner to the USRJC representing the Department of Defense
U.S. Side Chairman, USRJC Vietnam War Working Group (VWWG)
- Dr. Timothy Nenninger
U.S. Side Commissioner to the USRJC representing the U.S. National Archives and
Records Administration
U.S. Side Chairman, USRJC World War II Working Group (WWIIWG)
- Colonel Frank Tank
Director, Europe Mediterranean Regional Directorate (EM), Defense POW/MIA
Accounting Agency (DPAA)
- Mr. Richard Lyda
Acting Executive Secretary, U.S. Side of the USRJC
Chief, Joint Commission Support Division (JCSD), DPAA
- Senior Research Analyst, JCSD, DPAA; USRJC WWIIWG
- Senior Research Analyst, JCSD, DPAA; USRJC VWWG
- Subject-Matter Expert (SME), Indo-Pacific Directorate, DPAA
- Historian, EM, DPAA
- Interpreter and two Note Takers, JCSD, DPAA

Russian Side Participants

- Colonel (ret.) Andrey Taranov
Russian Side Commissioner, USRJC
Executive Secretary, Russian Side of the USRJC
Deputy Director, Directorate for Perpetuating the Memory of Fallen Defenders of the
Motherland, Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD)
- Colonel Eduard Paderin
Russian Commissioner, USRJC
Deputy Chairman, USRJC VWWG
Chief, Archival Service of the Russian MoD

- Dr. Yelena Tsunaeva
Russian Commissioner, USRJC
Acting Chairman, USRJC WWIIGW
Executive Secretary, All-Russian Public Organization “Search and Recovery
Movement of Russia” (NPO)
- Deputy Chief, Federal Procurement Department, Russian MoD
- Liaison Officer, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Acting Chief, Washington Office, Russian Side of the USRJC

Joint Opening Discussion

Mr. McKeague welcomed the group to Washington, D.C. He passed along greetings from the U.S. Side Co-Chairman, General Foglesong. He noted the continuation of these face-to-face interactions is a key component of the Commission and expressed his gratitude to the Russian Side for their participation in the Technical Talks. Mr. McKeague underlined the significance of the work the commission has accomplished over the last 28 years and remarked that it should continue to seek new avenues of cooperation. He then went over the key issues he hoped would be discussed. These topics included a status update on the approval from local authorities to excavate a site of interest in Novosysoyevka, Russia; a review of losses which occurred during the Vietnam War; and plans to travel to the Kamchatka Peninsula for a joint Russia-U.S. investigation of a possible B-24 crash site. Mr. McKeague expressed his belief that even though many of these issues have been discussed in the past, he hopes the Russian Side of the Commission understands why questions must continue to be asked as the U.S. Side searches for answers for the family members of the fallen.

Colonel Taranov expressed his thanks to the U.S. Side for their assistance in logistical preparations for this trip. He mentioned the importance of the upcoming 75th anniversary of the joint victory over the Axis Powers in WWII and that he hopes today’s work will harness that same spirit of cooperation. Colonel Taranov spoke briefly on the deep significance that this anniversary has in Russia. He noted virtually every Russian family was touched by loss during the war. In that vein, he announced the upcoming opening of an Armed Forces Cathedral near Moscow, Russia. Colonel Taranov described the multimedia exhibit, “Road of Memory,” which will encircle the compound. The new space includes a multimedia cultural center and a museum examining the lives and sacrifices of the 33 million people who took part in WWII. This complex is located at Patriot Park outside of Moscow. Additionally, he stated it is the intention of the Russian Side to hold the opening ceremony the same week of the Plenum in May so that the American Side of the Commission would be able to participate.

The two working groups then moved into separate rooms to conduct discussions focused on issues specific to their assigned areas of concern. The VWWG session addressed:

1. Access to Restricted Archives: Challenges and Declassification

Background: Records of interest to the U.S. Side of the VWWG might be held in Federal Security Service (FSB) and Military Intelligence Directorate (GRU) archives. Since these archives are not accessible to U.S. researchers, the U.S. Side has continually requested the

Russian Side facilitate access to them and conduct research using Russian archivists. Mr. McKeague asked about the status of access to these archives.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin stated he only has authority over Russian MoD archives. He added he does not have access to the archives that belong to other agencies, including the GRU, FSB, or any other agency. He suggested the U.S. Side submit requests, routed through the Russian Side Executive Secretary, directly to the USRJC Russian Commissioners who represent those archives. Additionally, the Russian Side acknowledged the letter General Foglesong sent requesting access to these classified archives was received and it was forwarded to the appropriate authorities. However, Colonel Paderin stated that at this time all archives of the Security Services are closed to everyone; this includes the Russian Side of the Commission as well.

2. Access to Records of Units Deployed to Vietnam; List of Units that Remained within the Newly Independent States after Dissolution of the Soviet Union

Background: One of the topics repeatedly discussed during previous engagements has been research within the records of the units that were deployed or that sent individuals or crews to Vietnam during the war. Colonel Paderin stated he is only the custodian of the records, and he needs permission for access from the owners to review the archival records in question and provide information to the U.S. Side. Previously, there had been no update from Colonel Paderin (although the Russian Side Executive Secretary, Colonel Taranov, had stated the search was being conducted). The U.S. Side is specifically interested in air defense units, the records of which may contain information on the shoot-downs of U.S. aircraft conducting combat operations in and around Vietnam.

Discussion: Mr. McKeague asked the Russian Side about the status of U.S. Side requests regarding access to records of the air defense units sent to Vietnam. Colonel Paderin acknowledged receipt of the requests, but said there was no concrete list of units that were deployed to Vietnam during the war. He reiterated that only specialists, typically from air defense and air force training centers, were sent to the area. He added that most of the specialists came from the air defense corps based in Moscow and Baku, Azerbaijan. The Russian Side stated that, unfortunately, there is no specific information on this issue, but it will continue working on it.

Mr. McKeague asked if the Russian Side was in contact with the archives in Azerbaijan. Colonel Paderin said that they do not send requests to the archives in Azerbaijan. Mr. McKeague asked whether it made sense for the U.S. Side to send requests to those archives, and Colonel Paderin answered yes.

Mr. McKeague then asked the Russian Side if archives in Belarus were a potential source of information. Colonel Paderin replied they possibly were, if specialists were sent there. The Russian Side also recommended the archives in the Baltic States. Colonel Paderin recommended the U.S. Side “widen its net” to include Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries. Mr. McKeague inquired about whether a list was compiled of units that remained in those countries after 1991. The Russian Side clarified that a list of units that participated in the Vietnam War and a list of the units that remained on those territories are two different things. Colonel Paderin added that no units remained in CIS countries.

He further explained that no Soviet units were deployed to Vietnam as whole units. Rather teams of advisors were sent to assist with the organization and training of organic North Vietnamese units formed in-country. Training centers were also established in Vietnam where Soviet specialists trained Vietnamese soldiers who would also train at centers in the Soviet Union.

Mr. McKeague asked if only Soviet advisors from Moscow and Baku were sent to Vietnamese 236th and 238th Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) Regiments or if some were sent from Baltic States or other countries of the former Soviet republic of Belarus. The Russian Side stated while it was possible that specialists came from other republics, there was no way to tell which specialists came from which republic. Colonel Paderin reiterated the 236th and 238th SAM Regiments were formed in Vietnam and manned by Vietnamese personnel. Soviet specialists were sent there to serve as advisors. As such, these air defense units were Vietnamese units. Based on that, Colonel Paderin stated he does not know at this time if such records are in Russian archives, but that they are likely in Vietnamese archives.

Mr. McKeague asked if it would be useful to search Vietnam War-era records of those Soviet units which deployed advisors to Vietnam. Colonel Paderin replied that is his focus, but he doubts the specific records are in Russian archives. He confirmed the Soviet advisors in those Vietnamese units sent daily reports of various occurrences that might have included losses, but to where they were sent is another issue the Russian Side is attempting to solve.

The U.S. Side SME stated researchers from DPAA had spoken to Vietnamese members who had served in those regiments. He added that members from the air defense units had little information regarding men and aircraft shot down, as they were not part of the search teams. The search teams were part of other units stationed nearby, which Colonel Paderin confirmed.

Mr. McKeague asked if the Soviet specialists brought any documents back with them to Moscow and Baku. Colonel Paderin replied they did not. He stated it was possible these specialists may have included relevant information in reports written regarding their missions. These reports would be classified and would not be found in Russian air defense museums.

Mr. McKeague asked if the records from the air defense corps in Baku had been turned over to TsAMO or if they had remained in Azerbaijan. Colonel Paderin replied that due to the nature of archival storage and associated procedures in place in the 1990s, it was hard to be sure.

The Russian Side stated all relevant information found in classified files to date has been shared with the U.S. Side.

3. Search for Information in the Russian Navy Archives.

Background: In 2016, the U.S. Side requested a search for reports by divers from Soviet trawlers and reconnaissance ships concerning search and rescue efforts of missing U.S. servicemen from the downed U.S. aircraft that crashed into the water. In response, the Russian Side asked for U.S. losses from over-water crashes. In 2018, Colonel Taranov stated a search would be conducted in the Russian Navy Archives. During the VWWG Technical Talks in 2019, the U.S. Side requested a status update and provided the Russian Side with information about Soviet OSNAZ (special purpose) reconnaissance ships, which conducted operations in the areas of U.S. combat activities in Vietnam from 1964-1974. At that time, Colonel Paderin stated he would conduct the searches.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin informed the U.S. Side that searches had been conducted by his team in the Navy Archives in Gatchina, St. Petersburg. The team looked at Soviet Pacific Fleet documents from 1961-1974, including political, staff, combat training, and reconnaissance. Additionally, his team reviewed documents from the 38th OSNAZ Brigade. The team also searched the records of Soviet Pacific Fleet General Staff. This included search and rescue documents and 942 cases, each of which was about 400-450 pages. Of those cases, 853 remain classified. The reports contained day-to-day information, but nothing about losses that would be of interest to the U.S. Side. Colonel Paderin stated the documents from the Soviet OSNAZ reconnaissance ships were more than likely held separately and are still classified.

Mr. McKeague asked if the Russian Side was able to review all the classified documents related to the 942 cases. Colonel Paderin confirmed it had and stated a report of the search findings was drafted in January 2020. When asked if he had an idea about where the special collections of documents might be held, Colonel Paderin answered he could not confirm, but they could be held in the archives of intelligence agencies.

Mr. McKeague asked if Vietnamese soldiers were assigned to OSNAZ, and Colonel Paderin answered they were not. Colonel Paderin added it is possible they shared information with the Vietnamese about B-52 flights taking off from Guam, since OSNAZ monitored the U.S. Navy. The ships who would have observed air losses were in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin.

The U.S. Side inquired about the list of 17 OSNAZ ships they had provided to the Russian Side. Colonel Paderin stated no relevant information had been found, only reports of day-to-day operations. The Russian Side stated while they had no finite data, it was possible the information the U.S. Side is searching for may be held in GRU archives. However, he clarified that records of the missions of each ship would not be in the GRU archives, as their activity was mostly unclassified.

Colonel Paderin described an entry regarding an incident in 1967 when the Soviet vessel, *Anemometer*, bumped into a U.S. ship while conducting its mission in the South China Sea. At the time, it was known that U.S. ships were attempting to push Soviet ships out of the area.

Mr. McKeague asked if any OSNAZ case reports might be with the 10th Main Directorate of the General Staff of the MoD, which is responsible for overseeing Soviet military

assistance. Colonel Paderin responded they would not, as the 10th Main Directorate oversaw the sending of specialists abroad.

With regard to the GRU, Colonel Paderin stated he does not have the authority to request access to their records and such requests must be made from chairman to chairman. He added the GRU is part of the MoD, but the responsibility lies with a separate branch.

Mr. McKeague stated the U.S Side is awaiting an answer from General Vostrotin, the Russian Side Chairman. He asked if the Russian Side had contact information for Commissioners from the 1990s who would have had GRU access, and Colonel Paderin responded such a request would need to be routed through Colonel Taranov to General Vostrotin.

4. Search for Information within the Records of Military and Civilian Hospitals

Background: During VWWG Technical Talks in 2019, the U.S. Side discussed the possibility of searching archival holdings of the Military Medical Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. Colonel Paderin had stated the Museum's archives were transferred to TsAMO and he promised to include records of civilian and military hospitals in his search.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin explained that the Military Medical Museum in St. Petersburg at one time also functioned as an archive for military medical records. Eventually, it was split into two separate organizations – a museum and an archive. The museum is open to the public. Colonel Paderin emphasized while the archives contain military medical documents, it does not have records of military hospitals. The archive consists of records from WWII and other combat operations. The records are mostly used for scientific research and there are no records from specific military units. Colonel Paderin said that military hospital administration records are kept in archives in military districts where the hospitals had been located. These archives fall under the purview of TsAMO.

Mr. McKeague asked if the Russian Side had access to the military hospital archives and Colonel Paderin confirmed they did. Mr. McKeague pointed out the U.S. Side was interested in those records because of interviews that suggested U.S. POWs were treated at hospitals in Vietnam where Soviet medical personnel worked. Colonel Paderin stated those hospitals are considered to have been temporary Vietnamese organizations. He added if lists of Soviet medical personnel and where they served exist, the Russian Side has yet to come across them. Those personnel may have been sent from anywhere in the Soviet Union.

5. Status of Requests for Information Submitted by VWWG U.S. Side

Background: The U.S. Side submitted several requests for information to the Russian Side from 2016 to 2018, which included two specific losses.

The first is the case of a C-47 Dakota shot down over the Plain of Jars in Laos on March 23, 1961 (REFNO 0004). An interrogation report confirmed the returnee was the sole

survivor and the rest of the crew of seven were killed. The returnee was captured and released from Pathet Lao captivity in August 1962. The remains of four crew members were returned and the remains of three individuals have not been recovered. In 2018, the U.S. Side submitted a request for information on these airmen, based on the Russian and other source documents in its possession.

The second case is of Maj Robert Stewart and Captain (Capt) Peter Pitman (REFNO 0681). On May 12, 1967, Maj Stewart and Capt Pitman were crewmembers aboard an F-105F aircraft on a single aircraft night strike mission over North Vietnam. The last radio contact with them occurred just after an air-to-air refueling operation at approximately 1855 hours, during which the crew reported no mechanical problems. Subsequently, radar contact was lost. The intended target was the Ron River Ferry Complex in coastal Quang Binh Province. When they failed to report at the next scheduled time, unsuccessful attempts were made to establish radio contact with the aircraft. The aircraft was reported missing at 2050 hours, at which time their fuel supply would have been exhausted. A limited electronic and visual search was begun, but since no other flights were in the area at that time, no organized search could be made. On May 13, 1967, flights passing through the area on the route to their targets conducted both electronic and visual searches without success. They did not attempt any organized search and rescue because of the hostile area, mountainous terrain, and lack of information as to where the aircraft had gone down.

In the past, the Russian Side has explained its archival search methodology. It conducts overall searches across massive archival collections for any relevant information. It is unable to conduct by-name searches.

Discussion: Mr. McKeague stated the U.S Side respects the Russian Side's archival search methodology. He explained specific cases are brought up because the U.S. Side's approach to research and analysis is case-based. He added individual families, Members of Congress, and U.S. media ask about specific cases. Mr. McKeague continued by saying when an unaccounted-for individual is mentioned in Russian archival documents, the U.S. Side submits requests for more information. He added in the past, Russian Side responses have been included in the response to family members and to Members of Congress.

Mr. McKeague reiterated in the past, the U.S. Side has provided to the Russian Side lists of all missing U.S. personnel from the Vietnam War. These lists have included different categories of losses: on land, over water, personnel last known alive, personnel who died in captivity, losses with unknown locations, and losses grouped by aircraft type.

Mr. McKeague provided the Russian Side with a summary of all U.S. Side requests submitted to the Russian Side. He added the summary also shows any progress made on each request. He explained the purpose of the document was to ensure nothing is lost in translation and it highlights the accountability to the families and the progress made by both Sides.

Mr. McKeague stated the U.S. Side is re-submitting requests for information regarding the cases of the returnee, Maj Stewart, and Capt Pitman, and providing additional details.

Mr. McKeague emphasized the request for information regarding the returnee was based on a Soviet interrogation report that referenced the three missing crew members. Colonel Paderin pointed out the report had been signed by the Chairman of the Committee for State

Security (KGB) and would not be held in TsAMO, but rather in the archives of the KGB or the Central Committee of the Communist Socialist Party of the Soviet Union. He went on to explain it would be useful for the Russian Side to have more information about the case. Mr. McKeague clarified the U.S. Side was requesting more information because the document had originated from the Russian Side in 1994. He added the U.S. Side wondered if the source document had since been declassified and provided a copy of the document to the Russian Side.

Regarding the case of Maj Stewart and Capt Pitman, the U.S. Side stated the request was based on a diagram provided by the Russian Side called “Battle of MiG-21s with Two F-105 Aircraft on May 12, 1967.” He added the U.S. lost two aircraft during that strike north of Hanoi. Mr. McKeague continued by saying it was unclear from the diagram whether it was an F-105 or F-104 that was shot down. If it was an F-105, any additional information regarding the crash site location or status of the pilot would be extremely helpful in furthering the U.S. Side’s investigation of the incident. Colonel Paderin stated the Russian Side would look for additional information in the relevant classified records and attempt to provide clarification.

6. Oral History Program

Background: In response to previous requests made to provide a list of former Soviet officers who served in Vietnam during the war, Colonel Paderin had stated he could not disclose relevant personal information, per Russian Privacy Law No. 152. He advised the U.S. Side work directly with Vietnam War veterans organizations on this matter.

Discussion: The U.S. Side stated it would submit a request through the Russian Side Executive Secretary, Colonel Taranov, asking for help from the Russian SMEs, researchers from the War History Research Institute, Military Academy of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, for arranging interviews, as they had offered to do so in 2017. Colonel Paderin replied he had no objections to the request.

Upon the conclusion of the two working group breakout sessions, the two groups rejoined for summarization of results and closing remarks.

Summarizing the VWWG Technical Talks

Discussion: As part of the summary of the 2020 VWWG Technical Talks, Mr. McKeague stated the U.S. Side would like to offer some suggestions. He stated in addition to the Plenary Session planned in Moscow in May 2020, a working level meeting should be scheduled to take place in the fall of 2020 to discuss progress and issues that may have arisen at the Plenary Session.

Mr. McKeague stated the U.S. Side planned to submit Summarized Minutes of this session through Colonel Taranov within the next few weeks. The minutes will serve as an official record of specific U.S. Side requests or actions discussed during the Technical Talks, and will be formalized and forwarded to the Russian Side in the form of official letters signed by the U.S. Chairman or Executive Secretary. Upon review, the Russian Side is

encouraged to inform the U.S. Side of any issues it would like added to the minutes. Colonel Paderin stated he had no objections, in general, about items discussed today.

Colonel Paderin expressed that his team will attempt to have clarification regarding the May 12, 1967, loss incident by the Plenary Session in May 2020 or sooner, if possible. He added it might be difficult to find information regarding the case of the returnee in a timely manner due the nature of the KGB archives, but that his team would try. He added the Russian Side is currently working on a summary and analysis of requests to outline any agreements or discrepancies associated with them.

Mr. McKeague expressed his thanks to the Russian Side for their efforts. He emphasized the summary would be beneficial, as it is important for the families to see the cooperation and progress of the two Sides over the years.

Colonel Paderin stated he had nothing to add. He reiterated the Russian Side search methodology had been discussed and although he had no new documents to provide at this time, he and his team would continue to look for information relevant to the issues raised.

The following after action items were agreed upon:

1. U.S. Side: Send a request to the Defense Archives of Azerbaijan to identify Soviet Air Defense units from the Baku Air Defense Corps that sent Soviet advisors (crews, groups, or augmentees) to Vietnam during the War; review relevant records and provide information, as permitted by the applicable Azerbaijan laws, to the U.S. Side of the USRJC and/or DPAA. Records of special interest are from Soviet Air Defense units that sent advisors who served in the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) Air Defense 236th and 238th Regiments.
2. U.S. Side: Send similar requests directly to the defense archives in other former Soviet Republics to identify units that sent personnel to Vietnam during the war and remained on the territories of those republics at the time of dissolution of the USSR, conduct searches for any information related to U.S. missing personnel, and if found, provide it to the USRJC U.S. Side and/or DPAA.
3. U.S. Side: Provide detailed information on U.S. loss incident Reference Number (REFNO) 0004, from which three persons are still missing (C-47 aircraft with a crew of seven lost in Laos on March 23, 1961).
4. U.S. Side: Request assistance from the USRJC Russian Side (SMEs and veteran organizations) in locating former Soviet veterans from the special group that collected equipment from the U.S. downed aircraft during the Vietnam War and for arranging interviews with them.
5. Russian Side: Conduct searches related to REFNO 0004 and REFNO 0681 (crew of two missing from the May 12, 1967 incident).

6. Russian Side: Continue searches among TsAMO records to identify Soviet Air Defense units from the Moscow and Baku Air Defense Corps that sent Soviet advisors (crews, groups, or augmentees) to Vietnam during the War, review relevant records and provide information to the U.S. Side.
7. Russian Side: Provide the status of U.S. Side requests from 2016-2019 in accordance with the list submitted to the Russian Side during these Technical Talks.

Joint Closing Discussion

Dr. Nenninger noted these were some of the most productive Technical Talks to date. He expressed his gratitude and excitement over the news the excavation at the site in Novosoyevka is moving forward. He promised to further research losses in the Vladivostok region for future missions. Dr. Nenninger expressed his hope the weather will cooperate enough to allow for an investigation trip to Vestnik Bay this summer.

Colonel Taranov agreed with Dr. Nenninger's assessment that these Talks were extremely fruitful. He thanked the U.S. Side for the information on Russian losses which allowed the Russian Side to account for the two Russians buried at Fort Richardson National Cemetery. Additionally, he added the discussion on losses in Poland and the Kurils could lead to future joint missions.

Mr. McKeague stated he believed the day's work was a success. After he outlined the highlights of the Vietnam War Working Group's discussion, he stated both Sides had also agreed to conduct the next round of Technical Talks in the fall of 2020.

Colonel Paderin remarked he, too, believed the work was a success and that even though there were no positive results discovered, there were still results reached.

Colonel Taranov stated the success today was due to excellent preparation and expressed his hope the Plenum in May will be just as successful.

Mr. McKeague thanked the Russian Side for making the long trip to the U.S. for the respective Technical Talks. He posed two questions to the Russian Side prior to closing the session out. The first was regarding the status of a new Russian presidential decree to fill longstanding vacancies on the USRJC. The Russian Side answered they believe the decree will be announced during the upcoming May Plenum in Moscow. Additionally, the Russian Side stated there will be a representative from both the FSB and Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) included in the decree. The second question was regarding a letter General Foglesong had sent to the Russian Side regarding access to Security Service archives. The Russian Side answered the letter was received and it had been routed to the appropriate authorities. They caveated their response by stating that at this time even the Russians on the Commission do not have access to those archives. The Russian Side stated they hope to discuss this issue further during the Plenum in May with the new Commission representatives from the FSB and GRU.

Mr. McKeague then reiterated the importance of the sacred responsibility that the USRJC must continue to seek answers for those who have lost loved ones in the defense of our great nations.