

**SUMMARIZED MINUTES**  
**World War II 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 Novosyoyevka, 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 75<sup>th</sup> 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 WWIIGW session addressed:

### **1. Recovery for July/August 2020 at Hospital 404, Novosyoyevka, Primorsky Krai**

**Background:** In 1995, a Russian national alleged he had seen four Americans alive in a hospital (Hospital 404) near Arsenyev in Primorsky Krai, Russia, in November 1951. He also claimed he was shown a grave in the hospital cemetery purported to contain the

remains of a fifth American. Based on the approximate dates the Russian national said he was in the hospital, JCSD analysts postulated the report of alleged Americans in the hospital could relate to the loss of a U.S. Navy P2V shot down on November 6, 1951, in the Sea of Japan near the Soviet coast. The hospital is approximately 150 miles northwest of Cape Ostrovnoy, where the Soviets reportedly shot down the P2V. From June 1995 through March 1996, joint U.S.-Russia teams conducted three separate visits to the hospital and cemetery. In addition to conducting interviews of local officials and potential eyewitnesses, the teams excavated four graves containing remains, all of whom were excluded as members of the P2V aircraft's crew; moreover, they appeared unlikely to be Americans. DPAA returned to the cemetery in May 2018 and performed a site survey using ground-penetrating radar in the location described by the Russian national. The joint DPAA-Russian team discovered more than four anomalies that warrant follow-up. The Russian Side is currently seeking approval from the local Russian government to return to the cemetery and excavate the anomalies.

**Discussion:** Colonel Taranov informed the U.S. Side the excavation request is not yet approved, but is expected to be approved by April/May. He added they expect to be ready to execute the mission by July/August. Additionally, the mission is already on the MoD's calendar. Colonel Tank inquired about the level of support the Russian Federation would provide the U.S. recovery team. Colonel Taranov answered it was prepared to provide all equipment and assist with the acquisition of visas. He also added there would be media presence as there was in 2018.

## **2. Crash Sites in the Northern Kuril Island – Kamchatka Area**

**Background:** During WWII, the U.S. Army Air Force and the U.S. Navy flew bombing missions from the Alaskan Aleutian Islands to the Japanese Shumshu and Paramushir Islands, which are part of the Kuril Island chain and located close to the southern tip of the Russian Kamchatka peninsula. If any of these U.S. planes were damaged or malfunctioned, the U.S. pilots could have diverted to Kamchatka to try to land. This area is remote and sparsely populated. There are several U.S. aircraft losses concentrated in the Russian Far East around Kamchatka. In addition to possible crashes on land on Kamchatka, some of these losses are believed to be in the water off the Northern Kurils and Kamchatka and may be at depths that would allow for recovery.

**Discussion:** The Russian Side presented an overview of the history of the Kuril Islands during WWII. Dr. Tsunaeva explained that during the final days of the war Soviet forces invaded the islands of the Kuril chain. In total 56 islands were reclaimed and more than 50,000 Japanese infantry soldiers were captured. The Island of Shumshu was the focus of most of the fighting as it was a stronghold for the Japanese during the war. Due to its fortification as well as the difficult weather conditions, the Soviet forces sustained heavy losses. Casualties included 1,567 Soviet soldiers killed and 123 missing. Dr. Tsunaeva explained her search group has been primarily focused on the recovery of those soldiers who are missing. To date, they have been able to find the remains of 36 Soviet Marines and 16 Japanese. She stated the search continues to this day. Her organization, Search and Recovery Movement of Russia, has a team based in Sakhalin and travels to Shumshu annually to continue their important work. Since the U.S. has a number of missing aircraft believed to be on the Kamchatka Peninsula and the Northern Kuril Islands, the U.S. Side expressed a desire to partner with the Search and Recovery Movement of Russia because they already have teams active in the area.

Dr. Nenninger provided the Russian Side with charts and a list depicting U.S. losses in the area around the islands of Shumshu and Paramushir and on Kamchatka. He requested assistance in performing targeted searches. The Soviet Union had Border Guards, Air Defense, and Naval observation posts on the southern tip of Kamchatka that most likely witnessed and reported on U.S. aircraft crashes during the war. Dr. Nenninger informed the Russian Side the U.S. researchers in Moscow would start archival research on known cases in the Central Archives of the MoD (TsAMO). He added if they find records are still classified, the U.S. Side will submit declassification requests to the Russian Side. Colonel Taranov agreed with this approach.

Dr. Nenninger asked if the Russian Side knew of any captured Japanese records at TsAMO. Colonel Taranov stated that there were no Japanese records kept in the Russian archives, as the Japanese forces were able to destroy them all prior to surrendering to Soviet forces in August 1945.

Dr. Nenninger explained it is expected that many of the U.S. losses in this area were over-water. As such, he inquired about the availability of hydrographic surveys and navigation charts that would depict underwater obstructions. The Russian agency responsible for navigation charts is the Department of Navigation and Oceanography of the MoD of the Russian Federation. Dr. Nenninger added a review of these charts would be beneficial for the research of over-water losses. Colonel Taranov stated a team conducted a hydrographic survey in the area in 2014, but they would not have kept their charts, if they were not considered official records. He indicated his team would check on official navigation charts. However, he also pointed out that the currents around these islands are very strong and expressed concern about how the current could have affected the crash sites.

### 3. B-24 at Vestnik Bay, Kamchatka

**Background:** The U.S. Side visited a U.S. B-24 crash site at Vestnik Bay on Kamchatka in 2004, but was not able to correlate it to a specific loss incident. At the WWIWG Technical Talks conducted in February 2018, the U.S. Side asked the Russian Side to conduct a search of its records for information that may pertain to this uncorrelated site.

**Discussion:** Colonel Taranov led the discussion with the results of the Russian Side's archival research on U.S. aircraft landings/crashes on Kamchataka. He stated they found a B-24 crash that occurred on Kamchatka on 12 August 1943. This plane was forced to land after completing a bombing strike against the Japanese forces located on Shumshu and Paramushir. During the forced landing, three crewmembers sustained serious injuries and eight received light wounds, one gunner perished from his wounds and was buried on Kamchatka. [Note: The crew for this B-24, #42-40309, is accounted for, and the aircraft did not land at Vestnik Bay.] Colonel Taranov then stated the Russian Side currently does not possess any additional information on any other American losses in the area. He then informed the U.S. Side there is Russian expedition on Shumshu Island (in the Northern Kuril Island chain) planned this year to search for Russian missing. The window to conduct the search is broad – sometime between April and November. They have to be flexible due to frequent hazardous weather conditions in the area. Colonel Taranov informed the group that if an opportunity arises, the Russian team will fly to Vestnik Bay to conduct a preliminary investigation of the B-24 crash site. Any information gathered or photographs taken during this expedition would be provided to the USRJC. He added that since this is strictly a reconnaissance mission there will not be any digging.

The U.S. Side asked about the possibility of passing specific information to the teams before their expedition (parts to look for, serial numbers, etc.). Dr. Tsunaeva stated she would relay all pertinent information to the teams. Colonel Taranov stated that if warranted, a joint Russian-U.S. expedition could be conducted. The U.S. Side informed the Russian Side that it would be difficult to quickly gather a team and execute a mission, if the weather conditions suddenly become favorable. The U.S. Side would require a 90-day notice to adequately prepare for such an expedition. Colonel Taranov stated planning will need to take into account the unpredictability of the local weather conditions. However he said he has a feeling they may have an answer in the spring. Colonel Tank said if they receive word a mission would be possible in August/September, then the U.S. would be able to participate. Colonel Taranov suggested that if indeed something is found by the Russian investigative team, and there is not adequate time to prepare, then the USRJC could plan on executing a joint mission next year to the site.

In addition, the U.S. Side asked specific questions related to planning for the joint expedition. Colonel Taranov responded the Russian Side would provide almost all of the in-country logistical and administrative support to include a base camp at the remote location of the crash site, transportation to the site, and visa and permitting support.

#### **4. WWII Post-War Reburial Records**

**Background:** During WWII, soldiers were often hastily buried in temporary graves. After the war, these temporary grave sites were consolidated to permanent burial sites. The U.S. Side believes that if we are able to track down the documents created during this transition period that record which temporary graves were moved to which new permanent sites, more identifications may be possible. The U.S. Side is seeking the assistance of the Russian Side in locating these records and identifying possible burial locations for missing soldiers from WWII.

**Discussion:** The Russian Side addressed the issue of reburial of temporary graves in formerly Soviet-occupied territory. Colonel Taranov confirmed that indeed such burials took place after the war. These burials, for the most part, were carried out by local authorities with the observation of Soviet forces. Colonel Taranov stated that unfortunately at the time of these reburials, the local authorities did not have access to any of the identifying information or records of those being reburied. He said these records were all held at TsAMO and they were classified at that time. The Russian Side stated during this time much information was lost. The information they do have is documentation on the number of people removed from the temporary sites, but the records do not include names. Colonel Taranov stated now it may be possible to pursue further identifications using a newly released database of Russian records on WWII which have been declassified and made available to the public. This database is online and is called "The Memory of the People." It was created for Russian citizens, and other citizens of the former Soviet Union, to research the records of former Soviet servicemen. Additionally he added if the exact location of the initial burial site is known, it may be possible to track down the location to where they were reburied. Colonel Taranov stated the reason they would need specific information is there were 587,000 initial burial locations, which were consolidated into 46,000 burial sites after the war.

The western portion of Poland today was part of Germany during the war. Colonel Taranov worked ten years in Poland researching grave locations. Part of his work involved tracing the temporary burial locations in German-named cities to their current

burial locations in Polish cities. According to Colonel Taranov, the Red Cross in Poland keeps very good archives related to these burials. He suggested the U.S. request assistance from the Polish Red Cross' archives. He believes this work could yield positive results as well. Colonel Taranov also added the Russian Side has contacts within the Polish authorities and offered to assist with contacting them.

## 5. Burial location of Soviet Military Personnel in Alaska from WWII

**Background:** There are eleven Soviet military personnel buried at Fort Richardson, Alaska. These Soviet servicemen took part in Lend-Lease transfer operations during WWII. Of the eleven graves, two were marked incorrectly with misspelled names on the headstones. The Russian Side has asked for assistance in confirming the identities of the persons buried at these locations.

**Discussion:** The U.S. Side stated it was able to locate files on the two deceased Soviet servicemen whose graves are in question: Arelski and Diikov. They were originally buried at Cold Bay, Alaska, and later moved to Fort Richardson National Cemetery. The U.S. Side has been unable to locate any record of this transfer. The Russian Side believes the original grave markers were misspelled and now considers these servicemen to be accounted for.

## 6. Elizabeth City Monument to Soviet, U.S., and British Commonwealth Aviators

**Background:** Project Zebra was a special Lend-Lease/pilot training program that began in March 1944. The Soviet Union sent flight crews to Elizabeth City, North Carolina, to train on PBN-1 Nomads and PBY-6A Catalinas. After training, Soviet flight crews ferried the aircraft to the Soviet Union. The Russian Side is seeking to place a memorial monument in Elizabeth City to the aviators who participated in Project Zebra and to commemorate the joint endeavor of U.S., U.K., and Soviet militaries in WWII.

On January 11, 1945, a PBN-1 crashed while taking off from the Pasquotank River. Four Soviet aviators and one Canadian perished in this accident.

In 2017, the Russian Side of the Commission made visits to Elizabeth City to propose the construction of the monument. The Russian Side provided a mockup of the proposed bronze statue and discussed a possible location on the river for the construction. At the time, the City Council agreed unanimously to go forward with the proposal. However, following local elections in the fall of 2018, the Council reversed its decision. The placement of the monument is currently in limbo.

**Discussion:** Colonel Taranov asked for an update on this issue. He explained the Russian Geographical Society is willing to help with the associated costs. He also stated only the mock-up had been created and the sculptors were ready to create the statue with smaller dimensions if needed.

The U.S. Side reiterated to the Russian Side that the decision to place the monument in Elizabeth City rests with the state and local governments. Though no decision had been made yet, the city's hope is to get approval to erect the statue near the Museum of the Albemarle on State property. The U.S. Side will inform the City Manager of Elizabeth City that the monument has not been cast yet, and if necessary, it can be reduced in size to accommodate a smaller site.

## 7. Access to Security Services Archives

**Background:** Because many WWII-related records have been declassified, U.S. Side contract researchers have been able to make significant progress on a number of cases. However, not all records have been declassified and the U.S. Side submitted several requests in the past. The U.S. Side currently has outstanding requests for searches in the Security Services Archives, namely for burial information about U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) Lieutenants (Lt) Coulson and Brewer, who were shot down on November 7, 1944, near Nis, Serbia, formerly Yugoslavia; and for burial information related to USAAF Technical Sergeants (TSgts) Marino and Sunberg in town of Debno, Poland, formerly Neudamm, Germany, on March 20, 1945; and for information on USAAF Lt Gorczyca, who was shot down near Bircza, Poland, on December 2, 1944.

**Discussion:** Dr. Nenninger asked the Russian Side if they have had any success locating information in the Security Services Archives on the U.S. Side's outstanding requests. Colonel Taranov recommended the U.S. Side pass the names once again and he will submit another request. Additionally, he stated that in the near future, the Chief of the Federal Security Service (FSB) Archives will be joining the Commission and that perhaps he will be able to assist with this request.

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

### **Summarizing the WWIIWG Technical Talks**

The following after-action items were agreed upon:

1. Russian Side: Secure permission from the local authorities to conduct a joint excavation at the cemetery at Hospital 404 in Novosysoyevka, Primorsky Krai, Russia, in July/August 2020.
2. U.S. Side: U.S. researchers in Moscow to begin archival research in the TsAMO looking for reports from observation posts on Kamchatka that may contain information on U.S. losses.
3. Russian Side: Find official navigation charts for the waters around Shumshu Island, Paramushir Island, and Kamchatka.
4. Russian Side: If the opportunity arises, fly a Russian team from Shumshu Island to Vestnik Bay on Kamchatka to conduct a preliminary investigation of the B-24 crash site.
5. U.S. Side: Provide instructions to the Russian Side on what to look for while conducting the preliminary investigation of the B-24 crash site at Vestnik Bay on Kamchatka.
6. U.S. Side: Request assistance of the Polish Red Cross in tracing possible reburials of U.S. service members on Polish territory.

7. U.S. Side: Inform the City Manager of Elizabeth City, NC, that the proposed Russian monument to WWII aviators has not been cast yet. The monument can be reduced in size if needed in order to accommodate a smaller space.
8. U.S. Side: Resubmit to the Russian Side requests for searches in the Security Services Archives, namely for burial information on USAAF Lts Coulson and Brewer, who were shot down on November 7, 1944; and for burial information related to TSgts Marino and Sunberg in the town of Debno, Poland; and for information related to Lt Gorczyca, who was shot down on December 2, 1944.

### **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 Novososoyevka 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.