

Military Memories – Komarov

One of the most significant memories I have while in the Air Force was the death of Russian Cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov. Komarov died when his Soyuz1 space capsule malfunctioned upon reentry on 24 April 1967. I was stationed in northern Japan from 1966 to 1968 and as a Russian linguist my job was to listen to Russian military voice communications. In addition to doing real-time transcripts of the Russian communications, we also recorded all of those communications on large tapes. On 24 April, I was on duty but working as an intelligence analyst, not as a monitor listening to Russian broadcasts. Another of my fellow Airmen was listening to the Russian space craft when it had reentry problems, the parachutes to slow the space craft did not deploy properly and the capsule crashed into the ground, killing Komarov. Soviet space capsules landed on ground while US capsules landed at sea. The Airman listening to Komarov heard him as he was coming down. Komarov knew that he was going to die but from what we heard, his communication to his ground station was that of a professional soldier. We heard him giving temperature, speed, altitude and other measurements as his capsule hurled toward earth. We did not hear any panic in his transmissions. As his capsule neared Earth, we lost communications due to the curvature of the Earth. His capsule crashed and he died in the crash. Since I was trained as a Russian linguist, I understood everything Komarov said when listening to the tape.

In 2011, a book was published entitled *Starman* which focused on the lives of some of the Soviet Cosmonauts, including Komarov. In the book, the authors claimed that US intelligence officials in Istanbul, Turkey were listening in and heard him crying as he approached Earth, cursing the people who had put him inside a botched spaceship and sent him to his death. I know that the Air Force had listening stations in Turkey similar to the one in Japan where I was stationed. All I can say is that is not what we heard.

According to the Smithsonian website, in 1971 the crew of US Apollo 15 placed a small aluminum sculpture on the moon along with a small plaque honoring the astronauts and cosmonauts who had died; Komarov's name is one of them.

Speaking of traveling, Sweetie and I are now back in Moorhead, we arrived last Saturday. We have an older motorhome that we drive to and from Arizona. As I said last week, we sheltered in place in the motorhome. We had very little contact with other people, only at RV parks and truck stops. Truck traffic was pretty normal but personal vehicle travels was very light. Be Safe!