

Russian Officers and Militants Identified as Perpetrators of the January 2015 Mariupol Artillery Strike

A Bellingcat Investigation



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Introduction

Bellingcat has determined conclusively that the artillery attack in the Ukrainian town of Mariupol on 24 January 2015, which resulted in civilian loss of life, came from Russia-controlled territory. Bellingcat has also established that the shelling operation was instructed, directed and supervised by Russian military commanders in active service with the Russian Ministry of Defense. Bellingcat has identified nine Russian officers, including one general, two colonels and three lieutenant colonels, involved directly with the military operation.

Furthermore, Bellingcat has determined that two artillery batteries of Multiple Launch Rocket Systems were transported from Russia into Ukraine the day before the Mariupol operation. In the early morning of 24 January 2015, these batteries were deployed near the village of Bezimenne exclusively for the shelling of targets in the outskirts of Mariupol, after which they were repatriated back into Russia.

In the course of analyzing the events in the eve of and on 24 January 2015, Bellingcat additionally identified two Russian generals involved with selection and assignment of Russian artillery specialists to commanding roles in Eastern Ukraine.

This investigation was made possible due to access to raw video and audio data submitted by the Ukrainian government. This data was made available to a small group of international investigative media for the purposes of independent assessment and validation of Ukraine's own findings. Bellingcat and its media partners analyzed a large volume of intercepted calls from and to participants in the armed conflict located in the area of Bezimenne at the time of shelling. Bellingcat conducted detailed cross-referencing of events, names and locations, as well as metadata from the calls, to open source data, including satellite photography data, social media posts, and voice samples from public statements of certain of the identified persons. A detailed analysis permitted the identification of persons and military units, and the reconstruction of events leading up to the shelling of residential areas in Mariupol.

While previous reports, including the OSCE SMM to Ukraine report from 24 January 2015, have identified that shelling of Mariupol's residential areas came from separatist-controlled territory, Bellingcat's investigation is the first to identify the role of active Russian military units, as well as the direct commanding role of active Russian army officers in this military operation.

Section One of this report describes the Mariupol shelling and the analysis of impact craters and firing directions by the OSCE SMM to Ukraine and Bellingcat. Section Two gives a detailed description of the events, mainly based on intercepted phonecalls. Section Three describes the identities of Russian officers and militants, who were involved directly or indirectly in the Mariupol shelling.

Section One : The 24 January 2015 Mariupol Shelling

On 24 January 2015, at least 29 civilians and one soldier died and at least civilians 92 were wounded after a rocket attack took place across Mariupol, including densely populated areas in the northeast part of the coastal city.¹ Dozens of videos² were recorded of the immediate aftermath of the attack, and three videos,³ recorded from vehicles, show the attack itself.



Screenshots from 24 January 2015 videos filmed in Mariupol on the day of the artillery strike.

¹ <http://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/shelling-in-mariupol-10-civilians-killed-46-wounded-378287.html>

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBQOkRIILkg>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGrqz4rNHug>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXB9yoZTpgg>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fphX1kjinBpk>

³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsCfVbvfhrc>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuoJfctHLZ4>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DF2VF5HjRuW>

Several media reports from 24 January 2015 described how houses, stores, and a supermarket were hit, ⁴ and that shelling started around 09:30 from the direction of Novoazovsk. ⁵ Foreign media reports detailed how 30 people died in the rocket attack. ⁶



Photographs from different media of the shelling of Mariupol, 24 January 2015.

The OSCE SMM (Special Monitoring Mission) to Ukraine reported that on 24 January 2015 it witnessed “massive Multi-Launch Rocket System (MLRS) salvos from a north-east direction” at 9:15, at 13:02 and 13:21, the first of which consisted of an extremely heavy barrage lasting 35 seconds. ⁷

The OSCE SMM to Ukraine initially identified the area hit by the morning salvo as a 1.6km by 1.1km residential region near Olimpiiska Street in northeast Mariupol, while the afternoon salvos hit an area approximately 300 meters to the north, near Ukrainian Army checkpoint #14. The OSCE SMM to Ukraine confirmed at least 19 rocket strikes in an area encompassing an open market, residential buildings, retail shops, and a school, and witnessed seven dead civilians, with four hospitals confirming that at least 20 people were killed and 75 injured, 10 of which were in critical condition.

⁴ <http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/3470533-maryupol-podverhsia-massyrovannomu-obstrelyu-fotoreportazh#5>

⁵ <http://apostrophe.ua/article/society/2015-01-24/mariupol-24-yanvary-2015-god/1139>

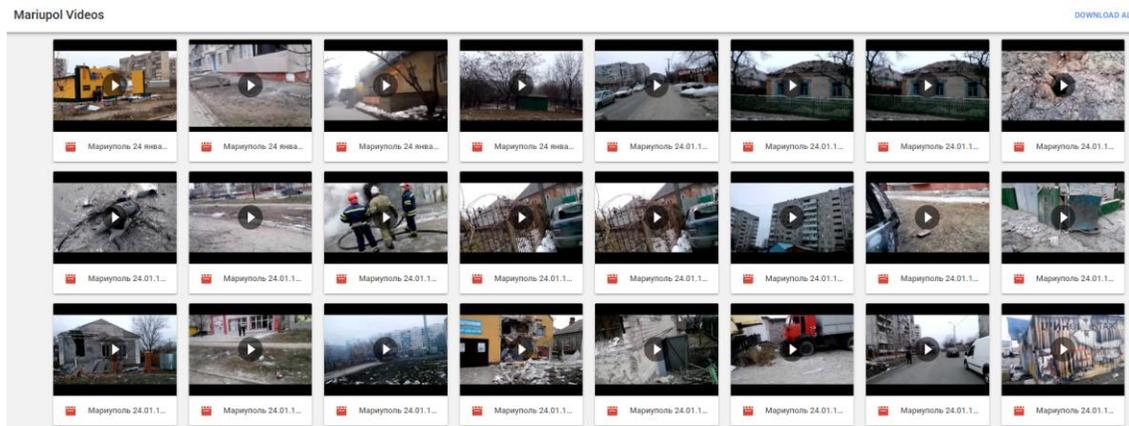
⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30967949>
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/24/missile-attack-pro-russian-rebels-ukraine-mariupol-donetsk>

⁷ <http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/136061>

The OSCE SMM to Ukraine analyzed⁸ a series of impact craters on the day of the attack and determined that BM-21 Grad 122mm MLRS and BM-27 Uragan MLRS were used. The monitors assessed the trajectory of the Grad rockets to be from a northeasterly direction (naming the non-government-controlled village of Oktyabr as a launch site), and the Uragan rockets to be from an easterly direction (naming the non-government-controlled village of Zaichenko as a launch site).

Bellingcat has carried out independent analysis on the craters and potential firing sites to assess the findings of the OSCE SMM to Ukraine. The source materials for the assessment include a number of videos showing the attack and its aftermath, including the craters. By using an analysis method from the U.S. Army,⁹ we were able to estimate the trajectory of fire based on the craters in Mariupol. We then cross-referenced these approximate trajectories with burn marks east of Mariupol in Russian and/or separatist-controlled territory, revealing a number of potential firing sites. Both the estimated trajectories and potential firing sites correspond with the findings presented by the OSCE SMM to Ukraine and point to Russian and/or separatist-controlled territory.

To preserve the evidence, a database of archived videos from the shelling and its aftermath was compiled and saved by Bellingcat.¹⁰ These materials served as the data for our analysis of the craters and potential firing sites east of Mariupol.



Archived videos from the shelling and its aftermath

Some of the key videos were provided for independent analysis and validation to a small group of investigators, including Bellingcat, as previously discussed. These videos, which are also accessible in our collection of video materials, include drone imagery, filmed above Mariupol shortly after the shelling, thus providing useful data to assess the affected areas and the origin of artillery fire by analyzing the fresh craters.

⁸ <http://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/136061>

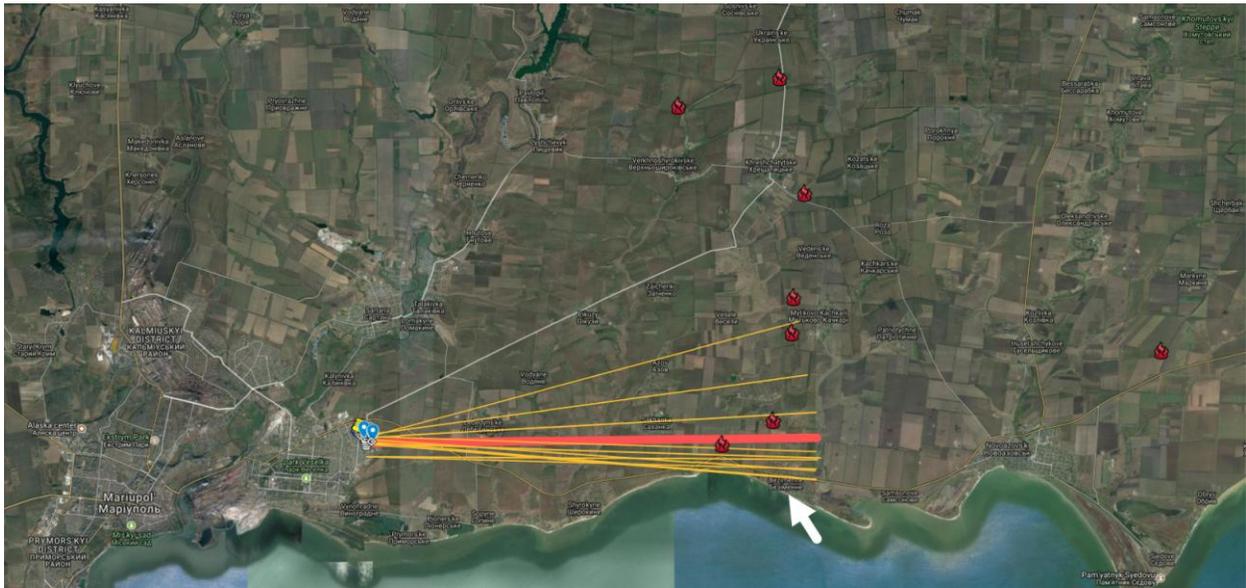
⁹ https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/6-50/Appi.htm#fig_3

¹⁰ <http://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16GoPG1de39tAQqlerLtEQyNM0KvbX5XX?usp=sharing>



Screenshot from a video filmed from a drone in Mariupol shortly after the shelling, 24 January 2015.

Bellingcat analyzed public videos, private drone footage and satellite imagery to establish estimated artillery trajectories and potential firing sites, which we visualized on a map.¹¹

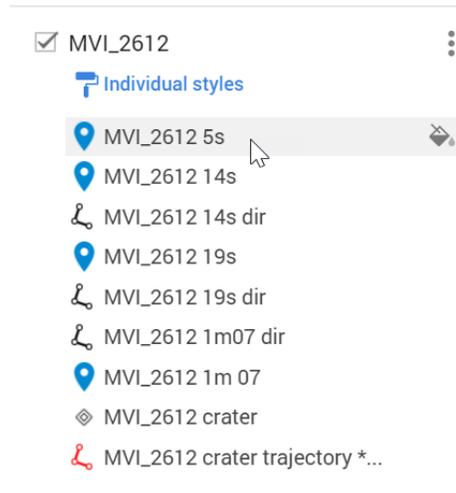


Estimated artillery trajectories (yellow lines) and potential firing sites (red fire symbols). The average trajectory is marked by a thick red line, pointing in a direction northwest of Bezimenne (white arrow).

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<http://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1noAwcBq2lvnJ4OdeCa4Q6n0DdQxXG7B8&ll=47.15268768827212%2C37.78335527906802&z=12>

The videos used to determine the craters, including timestamps, are noted in different layers of the map. For example, layer 'MVI_2612' refers to video 'MVI_2612.MOV'¹² in our directory, and the point 'MVI_2612 5s' refers to a crater visible at the 5-second mark of video 'MVI_2612.MOV.'



Different layers of the map note videos and their timestamps

The archived videos we used in our assessment were geolocated and verified by the Bellingcat team. For example, in one of the drone videos, we can compare the scene of a shelled building with historical satellite imagery, showing how the destroyed roof of a building was replaced by viewing Google Earth's snapshot of the scene from March 2015.

¹² <http://drive.google.com/file/d/1i2C6rOPEk4tRywigJiMR8IfwNE3fTWR8/view>



Top: a partly destroyed building from the drone footage, 24 January 2015; bottom: the same building restored, the darker area in the roof is the repaired part after the attack, 9 March 2015.

Section Two : Detailed Description of Events

Summary of events immediately prior to and on the day of shelling of Mariupol

Based on holistic analysis of the available evidence, as described in more detail later in this section, Bellingcat was able to reconstruct the following course of events leading to the loss of civilian life in Mariupol on 24 January 2015.

On the morning of 23 January 2015, a Russian colonel with the call sign Goretz, stationed in Donetsk and supervising artillery operations in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DNR), received instructions from Russian military command to initiate a military operation against targets in the outskirts of Mariupol. The operation envisaged coordinated, mass-scale barrage of shelling by several artillery batteries on 24 January 2015. Most of the targets and the motivation for this military campaign cannot be determined definitively from the evidence reviewed by Bellingcat.

The artillery operation was to involve two rocket artillery batteries from Russia, and one or two local batteries integrated in the military structures of the DNR. The key role was allocated to the Russian batteries.

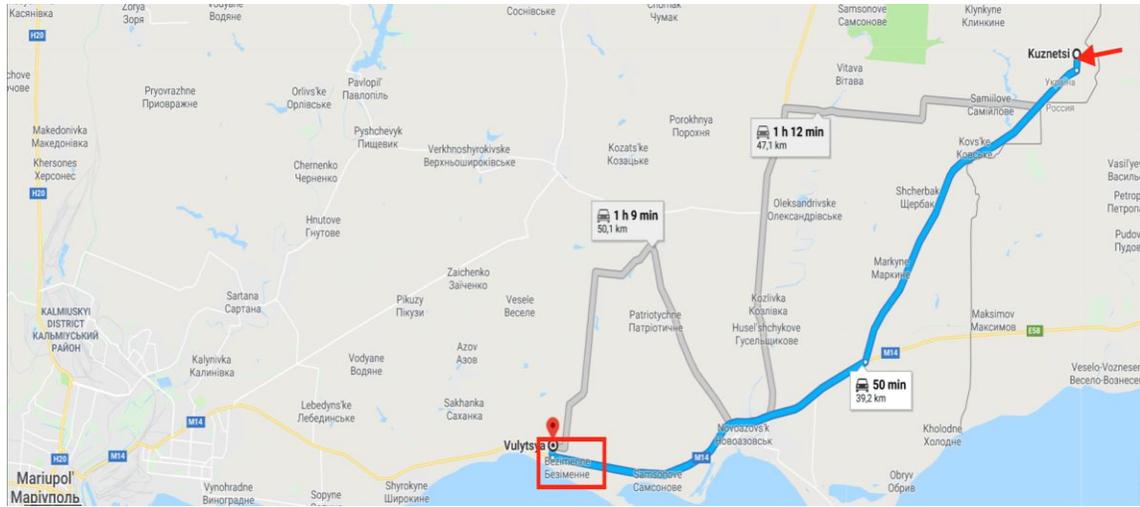
To this goal, two MLRS batteries consisting of six (2x3) launchers each, were to be transported from Russia to Ukraine. One battery, referred to in phone calls as the '200th', was dispatched from the 200th Detached Motorized Artillery Brigade (military unit 08275,¹³ based in the village of Pechenga near Murmansk. Bellingcat has previously documented the role of this military unit in the Donbas¹⁴) while the second battery, referred to as the '5th', was dispatched from the 2nd Detached Guards Taman Motorized Artillery Brigade (military unit 23626¹⁵, stationed in Naro-Fominsk near Moscow). The original appellation of unit 23626 until May 2013 has been "the 5th Detached Guards Taman Motorized Artillery Brigade"; thus the references among officers in intercepted calls reflect its traditional designation.

Both Russian batteries were ordered to cross into Ukraine after nightfall on 23 January 2015 via an unofficial border crossing at the village of Kuznetsi. The batteries were instructed to cross back into Russia as soon as the one-day operation was completed.

¹³ <http://voinskayachast.net/voenno-morskoj-flot/beregovie-voyska/vch08275>

¹⁴ <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2016/01/16/russias-200th-motorized-infantry-brigade-in-the-donbass/>

¹⁵ <http://recrut.mil.ru/career/soldiering/multi/more.htm?id=4700@morfVideoAudioFile>



Kuznetsi is a village in pro-Russian controlled territory just on the border with Russia. There is no official border crossing at Kuznetsi, and satellite imagery shows that as late as September 2014, most tracks left by military vehicles crossing the border east of Mariupol were near the official Maksimov-Novozovsk checkpoint. However, a new “road” across the border became visible in later satellite imagery, suggesting the Kuznetsi “crossing point” became functional as of September or October 2014, and was used as recently as March 2018, as noted in an OSCE report.¹⁶

To support the shelling operation by the two Russian batteries, at least one local artillery battery, part of the so-called 9th Regiment of the DNR headquartered at Bezimenne, approximately 20 km east of Mariupol, was instructed to provide synchronized firepower at the same targets in and around Mariupol.

The synchronized artillery operation by at least three batteries was planned to start at 07:30 on 24 January 2015. However, one of the Russian batteries got disoriented on the Russian side of the border and crossed into Ukraine only in the morning of January 24th, leading to risk of exposure during daylight, and a significant delay to the start of shelling. The other Russian battery arrived on time but two of its artillery transporters or launcher vehicles collided, disabling two launch units. The Russian command decided to begin the operation with only one partially functional Russian, and one local battery in place. The first Russian battery began firing salvos at approximately 08:00, and the second Russian battery joined at approximately 10:30.

Each battery was instructed to fire 3 to 4 concentrated salvos at a minimum of 8 targets which primarily overlapped among the three batteries. Between salvos, the launchers were retreated to reloading locations approximately 20 km further away the firing sites.

Bellingcat could not ascertain the precise locations targeted by the military operation, as targets were provided in encrypted form: either as numerical targets (101,102, 103 and so on), or as *ad-hoc* GPS coordinates following a custom encryption algorithm. In total, Bellingcat counted 8 different targets being provided to unit commanders.. An analysis of

¹⁶ <http://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine/374752>

the crater scatter shows a dispersed pattern of hits across Vostochny region in Mariupol, with a concentration in the densely populated region of Olimpiiska street. Individual crater analysis leaves no doubt that the shelling came from a direction northwest of Bezimenne.



The yellow-shaded area pinpoints the region of approximately one square kilometer in Mariupol's Vostochny District which was hit by concentrated artillery fire on 24 January 2015. The two red stars pinpoint the likely firing sites based on Bellingcat's trajectory analysis and identified blast marks. Both are consistent with evidence gathered from telephone intercepts.

Intercepted calls indicate that as of 10:00, the Russian command was already informed of residential areas of Mariupol having been hit by missiles, grossly misdirected fire of certain of the launchers, and general issues with target coordinates and/or corrections. Despite this, the commanding officers decided to proceed with shelling until completion of the planned operation.

At approximately 14:00, a Russian commander, whom Bellingcat has identified as the then-Artillery Commander of the Southern Military District of Russia, called the senior-most Russian artillery commander in Donetsk (call sign Gorets), and instructed him to suspend shelling immediately due to a sudden spot check by an OSCE inspection commission. Gorets instructed that all mobile launchers be hidden in hangars, and all transporters (and accompanying Russian personnel) be hidden in forests, to avoid being spotted by OSCE. Furthermore, the command was issued to remain in hiding until nightfall and then repatriate the batteries back to Russia.

However, less than an hour later, this command was reversed and the batteries were instructed to return to firing sites for completion of the operation. Between 16:00 and 18:00, the two batteries crossed back into Russia, where they were met by the Artillery Commander of the Southern Military District.

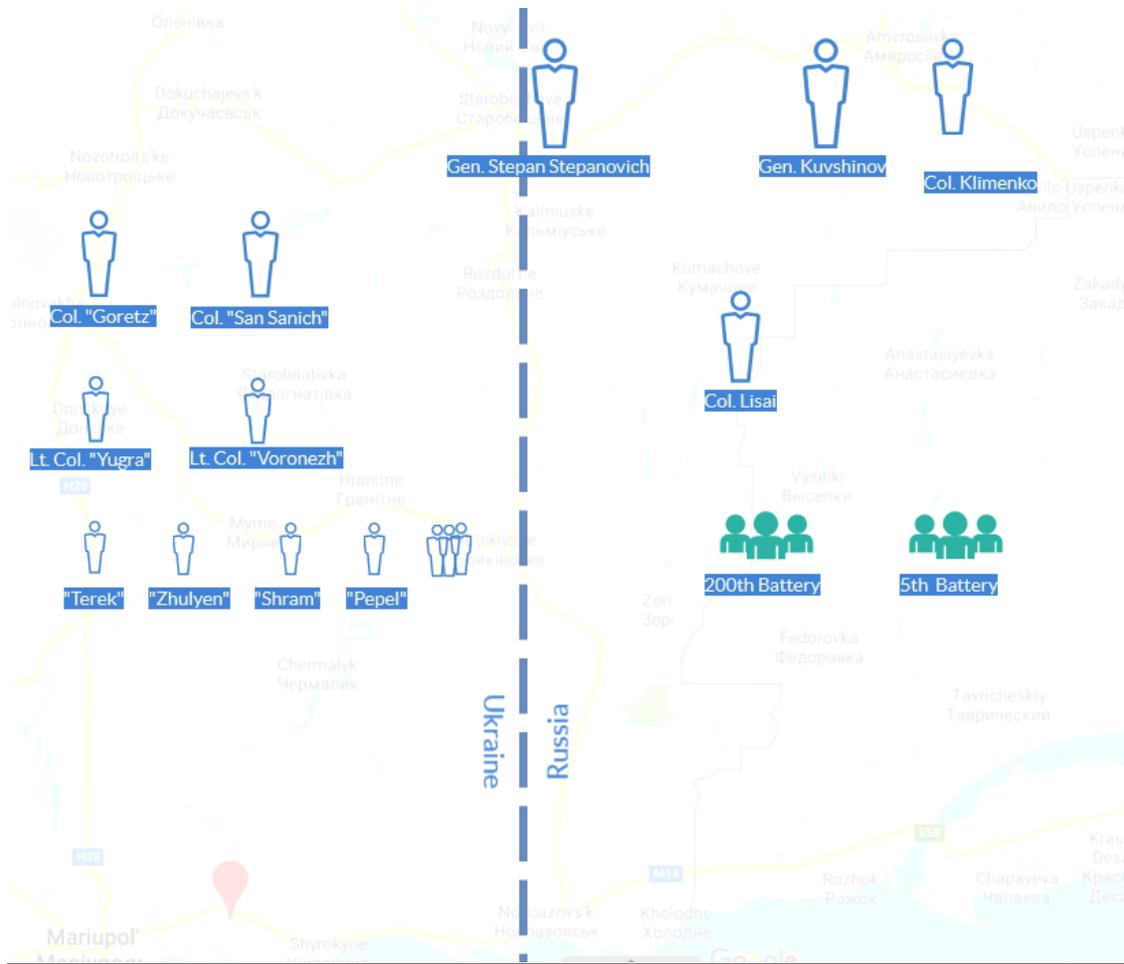
Chain of command

The evidence reviewed by Bellingcat leaves no doubt that the artillery operation on 24 January 2015 that led to the significant loss of civilian life in Mariupol was instructed and supervised by acting Russian military officers, with the firing commands for the two Russian batteries originating directly from Gorets, at that time a ranking colonel who was subsequently promoted to major general. Gorets, who had been sent to the DNR on temporary assignment from his regular military base in St. Petersburg, reported directly to a major-general referred to as "Stepan Stepanovich", who at that time served as the Commander of the Southern Russian Military District. Stepan Stepanovich was the highest-ranking Russian commander identified by Bellingcat who was directly involved in the artillery operation on 24 January 2015. In one intercepted phone call, Gorets is heard saying that Stepan Stepanovich's superiors are pressuring him for real-time updates and faster progress; implying the chain of command of the operation went higher up than Gen. Stepan Stepanovich.

Another Russian colonel, referred to as 'San Sanich', or 'Alexander Alexandrovich', was in charge of and provided firing commands to the Bezimenne-based battery incorporated in the 9th Regiment of the DNR.

One Russian active lieutenant colonel, call sign Yugra (also referred to as Maks), who also was on temporary assignment to the DNR, was in operational command of the transportation from the Russian border and the shelling operation of the two Russian batteries on January 24th. Another Russian lieutenant colonel, call sign Voronezh, who was similarly on temporary assignment to the DNR, commanded shelling by the local DNR 9th Regiment battery.

The senior-most ranking officer escorting the two Russian batteries into and out of Ukraine was a colonel who was the active Artillery Commander of Russia's 36th Army. The batteries were met at the Russia-Ukraine border and assisted throughout the day by three artillery unit commanders based in DNR, one of whom was an active Russian major on assignment, the second was a local Ukrainian militiaman, and the third a DNR company commander who was a Russian citizen and a former sergeant in the Russian army.



Chain of command in Eastern Ukraine and Russia on 24 January 2015

Key actors

Gorets: a colonel from the Russian Army, at the time of events serving as deputy Commander of Artillery of the Western Military District based in St. Petersburg. Sent on assignment to the DNR from October 2014 through March 2015 with the responsibility of supervising artillery operations.

Based on mobile phone cell-tower data and the context of telephone conversations, Gorets was customarily stationed at the headquarters of the “Ministry of Defence” of the DNR, and reported directly to General ‘Stepan Stepanovich’. On the day of the described events, he was based in Donetsk.

Stepan Stepanovich: a major general from the Russian Army; at the time of the events Artillery Commander of the Southern Military District based in Rostov. Based on the context of telephone conversations, he is the senior-most commander for artillery operations in the DNR; referred to by Russian artillery officers in Eastern Ukraine as ‘the Chief Commander’, and ‘The First’. His calls are from a Russian mobile number registered to the Ministry of Defense.

Yugra (Maks): a lieutenant colonel from the Russian army; at the time of events formally serving as artillery unit commander from 275th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment, military unit 73941 in Naro-Fominsk near Moscow. In fact, he was temporarily assigned as Artillery Commander at the 9th Regiment of the DNR, headquartered in Bezimenne, a coastal village approximately 30 km to the east of Mariupol. Reports substantively to Gorets, with a dotted-line subordination to his local regiment commander – ex-Berkut Colonel Alexander Marinchenko. In mobile phone communication, Gorets is frequently heard providing targeting instructions to Yugra/Maks, as well as requesting operational reports and updates from the Mariupol front-line. Mobile cell-data shows that Yugra/Maks is regularly stationed in Bezimenne, and was there on the day of the described events.

San Sanich: Russian colonel, commander of the 385th Guards Artillery Brigade located in Totskoe-2, near Orenburg. Sent on assignment to the DNR in autumn of 2014. Headquartered at the “Ministry of Defense” of the DNR in Donetsk. Appears to be of a lower operating position than Gorets.

Voronezh: Russian lieutenant colonel. Unit commander at 385th Guards Artillery Brigade in Totskoe-2, sent on assignment to the DNR, in charge of an artillery battery within the DNR’s 9th Regiment.

Lisai: Russian colonel. Artillery Commander of the 36th Russian Army based in the Russian Far East. Was tasked with supervising the “secondment” of the 5th and 200th batteries from Russia to Ukraine for the Mariupol operation.

Terek: a lieutenant colonel from the 4th Fourth Guards Kantemirovskaya Tank Division. Delegated temporarily to the 9th Regiment of the DNR.

Shram: sergeant from the Russian army, in reserve since 2003. Volunteered for service in Eastern Ukraine. An artillery company commander in the 9th Regiment. Staged his death shortly after the Mariupol events. Unknown if still alive.

Pepel: Born in Makiivka, Ukrainian citizen. Targeting and direction officer, spotter within the DNR's 9th Regiment. Staged his own death shortly after the Mariupol events. Still alive.

Chronological Reconstruction of Events on 23 January and 24 January 2015

Impact crater analysis, conducted by Bellingcat on photo and video footage of the aftermath of the shelling of Mariupol on 24 January 2015, points to likely launch positions situated northwest of the village Bezimenne, controlled by pro-Russian separatists. These findings are generally consistent with the OSCE SMM to Ukraine's assessment of the incident.

To reconstruct the events surrounding the shelling on 24 January 2015, Bellingcat analyzed a large volume of intercepted calls to and from participants in the armed conflict located in the area of Bezimenne at the time of shelling. The phone intercepts were in raw pcm (wav) format that do not contain embedded metadata. Each audio file was matched by a metadata dump from the respective mobile operator's system, containing timestamps, duration, cell-tower data, direction of call, MSISDN, IMSI, ObjId, and CallId (together, "call metadata"). While there is no technical way to validate the authenticity of the phone calls, the call metadata is internally, and to the extent Bellingcat could match it to external databases, externally consistent. None of the audio files showed any evidence of splicing, deletions or any other form of editing, and call duration matched call metadata precisely. Bellingcat thus concluded that the phone call intercepts were valid and untampered evidence for the conclusions made in this report. Key phone calls referenced in this report are transcribed and available in English and Russian on our website.¹⁷

Bellingcat's analysis, which included detailed cross-referencing of events, names, and locations mentioned in the calls, as well as call metadata, permitted the reconstruction of events leading up to the shelling of residential areas in Mariupol and the ensuing death of at least 29 civilians and injury of at least 92 more.

"A Task of National Importance"

Note: From the context of analyzed phone traffic, Bellingcat concluded that communication among Russian artillery officers stationed in the DNR was either via land-line (considered secure) or via mobile phone (considered insecure). Conversations via mobile phone is typically restricted to a minimum and includes numerous and frequently changing coding conventions, such as use of gardening terminology as proxy for artillery concepts (i.e. "cucumbers" = missiles, "sowing the plants" = shelling, "watering the bed" = loading, and so on). Target geo-coordinates are provided customarily via mobile phone – including as SMS text messages – but are encrypted by a custom algorithm. References to locations or to the actual names of people in phone calls appears to not be permitted, except in extreme and

¹⁷ <http://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/05/10/audio-collection-shelling-mariupol-january-2015/>

unavoidable circumstances. Detailed discussion of new sensitive plans or operational instructions are never carried via mobile phone, but via land-lines that are not subject to tapping by the Ukrainian security services.

At 12:20 on the day before the shelling of Mariupol, 'Gorets' contacted 'Maks' ('Yugra') by phone and instructed him to switch to a secure line.

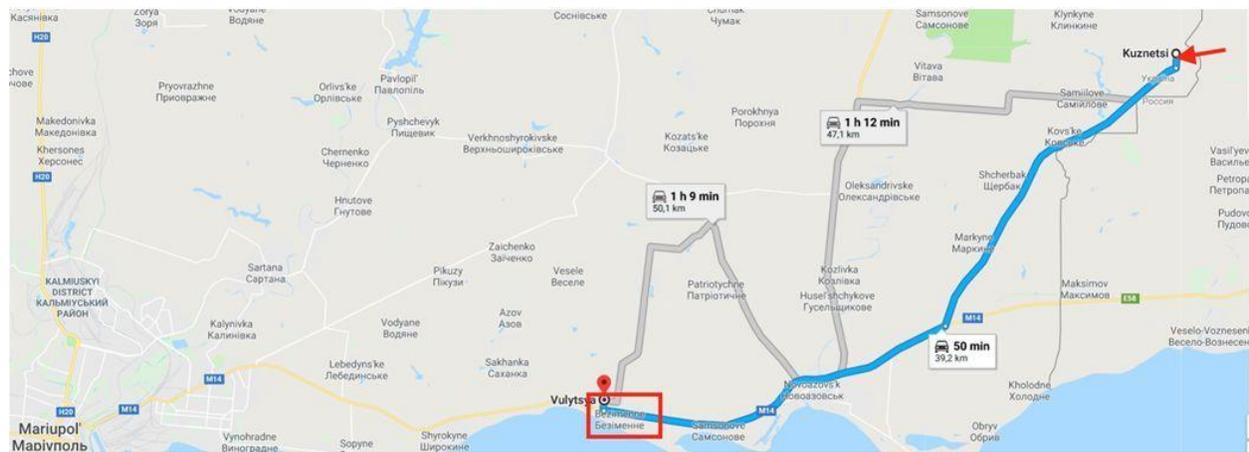
The secure-line call took place shortly after noon on 23 January 2015, and was followed by two more land-line calls in the following two hours. After these calls, Maks instructed his subordinates – artillery unit commanders 'Terek', 'Ruben', and company commanders 'Alan' and 'Shram' – to report to headquarters for an emergency briefing. Maks stressed the urgency of the matter to Shram, who initially said that he could not immediately come to base as he was in hospital accompanying a wounded soldier. *"Screw the soldier",* said Maks, *"We've been given a task of national importance".*

In a subsequent GSM call that afternoon, Gorets asked Maks to *"double-check targets 103 and 112"*, because *"the commanders are somewhat unsure about these"*.

From the context of the call, as well as from the nomenclature of the targets heard on calls the next day, it was clear that these numbers corresponded to shelling targets within and/or around Mariupol that have been proposed by Maks for the planned artillery operation the following day. However, it was impossible to deduce the exact location of the two targets, or why Gorets's superiors had misgivings about these two targets.

During one of the open-line calls with Maks on that afternoon, Gorets discovered that the DNR's 9th Regiment had two casualties on that day: a *"military adviser and a Russian"* [not clear if reference to a Russian mercenary/volunteer, or a regular officer]. Gorets then complains that *"Whenever the Ukrainian artillery fires, they always hit their target. Whenever DNR artillery starts firing, they can't get closer than 300 meters"*.

In several subsequent open-line calls, Gorets continuously updated instructions to Maks as to where *"the two organisms"* will arrive. From the context of the instructions, it became clear that Gorets referred to two Russian army units which were to cross the Russia-Ukraine border at potential locations discussed earlier on the secure-line calls. Maks then passed on the instructions by mobile phone to his team leaders, directing them, alternately, to meet the incoming 'relatives' at the 'southern', respectively the 'northern' location, based on the latest instructions from Gorets. Ultimately, Maks was forced to breach secure protocol - to avoid misunderstanding by his team - and explicitly named the crossing location as *"Kuznetsi"*.



Location of Kuznetsi in Eastern Ukraine, near the Ukraine-Russia border, about 40 kilometers from Bezimenne (in red rectangle).

The identity of the *“two organisms”* became clear from the context of the intense calls between Gorets and Maks, and Maks and his team commanders, in the subsequent 24 hours. One of the *“organisms”* crossed the border on time, while the crossing of the other was delayed until the morning due to miscommunication on the point of entry and disorientation on the Russian side of the border. Due to the confusion around which battery was delayed, Gorets was forced to ask Maks *“which battery - 5th or 200th”* - made it on time. Maks, in turn, had to enquire from his men to ask the arriving units of the first *“organism”* to which battery they belong, and it becomes clear that *“200th”* is the one that made it across the border on time, while the *“5th”* is delayed.

Bellingcat’s analysis of the nomenclature of Russian artillery units, as well as the context of intercepted communication with members of the arriving units, indicates with very high likelihood that *“200th”* corresponds to a battery provided by 200th Detached Motorized Artillery Brigade (military unit 08275,¹⁸ based in the village of Pechenga near Murmansk), while *“5th”* corresponds to a battery of the 5th Detached Guards Taman Motorized Artillery Brigade, military unit 23626¹⁹ (in May 2013 renamed to the 2nd Detached Guards Taman Motorized Artillery Brigade but still commonly referred to as *“5th”*²⁰), stationed in Naro-Fominsk near Moscow. No other specialized artillery units in the current nomenclature of the Russian army have the numbering 5 or 200 in their name. Bellingcat’s identification is further corroborated by imagery of damaged MLRS transporters belonging to the 200th

¹⁸ <http://voinskayachast.net/voenno-morskoj-flot/beregovie-voyska/vch08275>

¹⁹ <http://recrut.mil.ru/career/soldiering/multi/more.htm?id=4700@morfVideoAudioFile>

²⁰ <https://vk.com/army23626>

Detached Motorized Artillery Brigade, photographed and geolocated to an area near Murmansk a month after the shelling of Mariupol.

Bellingcat has previously documented the use of the 200th Artillery Brigade in Eastern Ukraine²¹. Other researchers have identified the use of the 5th (now 2nd) Artillery Brigade in recent Russian military operations in Syria²².

Preparations and Confusion

During the night of 23rd to 24th of January, Maks supervised the progress of entry into Ukraine of the two Russian columns, and their movement to the firing locations. He was based at the Russian/DNR headquarters in Bezimenne, maintaining continuous secure communication with Donetsk. Bezimenne is approximately 35 km from Kuznetsi, and Maks communicated via mobile phone with his four unit commanders in the field.

In the early part of the night, there was confusion as to who had already arrived from Russian territory and who had not. A report to Maks at 03:46 mistakenly reported that both Russian batteries had arrived, which Maks reported upstream. At 05:01, however, it became clear that only battery “200th” had successfully crossed the border, while battery “5th” had gotten lost while taking a circumvent road, and would arrive “from the north” later in the morning. The earlier confusion was clarified by an explanation that both battery commanders had crossed the border and met with Maks’s team earlier in the night “for reconnaissance”, but neither of military columns had yet arrived.

At around 05:30, it became clear that the second battery would not make it to the firing location before dawn. One of the unit leaders asked Maks if it still made sense to proceed with the operation on that day, or instead if they should “hide” the arriving units and defer the operation. Maks responded that “the task has already been given” and that he could not report a failure; thus, they must proceed with the operation. At 06:11, Terek asked if the command still stands, despite the fact dawn was already breaking. Maks confirmed.

Throughout the night, hectic instructions flowed from Maks to his team leaders.

- It became clear that each of the two artillery battery commanders – Terek and Ruben - must meet their respective Russian battery convoy and take them to the loading locations and subsequently to the launch locations. Ruben was assigned to the 200th, and Terek to the 5th battery.

²¹ <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2016/01/16/russias-200th-motorized-infantry-brigade-in-the-donbass/>

²² <https://informnapalm.org/36078-v-sirii-artilleristy-2-j-tamanskoj/>

- It also became clear that there were strict commands for the first salvo to begin at 07:30, with a readiness check at 06:55. Initially, the instructions were for both batteries to start shelling in sync.
- When it became clear that “5th” battery could not make it on time for the planned start, Maks commanded that whichever group is *in situ* on time must start shelling at 07:30, while the other battery will catch up upon arrival.
- The battery commanders were instructed to make continuous “retreat loops” – firing a series of salvos from the shelling locations, then quickly retreat to their temporary bases for re-loading, and then finally travel back to the launch location for a new round of salvos. Team leaders are instructed use the “gardening terminology” for reporting progress.

In parallel, another Russian colonel, “San Sanich”, and his subordinate Voronezh, a Russian lieutenant colonel, both based in Donetsk, instructed an artillery battery from the DNR’s 9th Regiment to prepare for synchronized shelling starting at targets in Mariupol at 07:30.

At 06:30, Maks reported to Gorets on an open line that the “second half of the family” had not arrived yet, and that they will proceed with the first half as planned.

At 06:55, Ruben reported to Maks that the units under his guidance are *in situ*, and asked for updated instructions. Maks gave him changed target instructions. The initial targets had been 104, 105, and 106; however, Maks told him he needed to provide additional corrections for 104, so for the initial salvo, 200th battery had to target 105 twice, instead of 104. No corrections for atmospheric conditions had yet been applied, and they had to be done in real time on an ad-hoc basis.

At 07:15, Maks received a report that the second artillery battalion of the 200th battery was still at the loading site, and he commanded them to move to the launch site immediately.

At 07:19, Terek reported to Maks that the 5th battery had finally crossed the border, and that it would take him about 40 minutes to get to the loading location.

At 07:20, Maks asked Ruben when his unit would be ready to start fire. Ruben said the battery had no barometer, and asked Maks for data on atmospheric pressure.

At 07:23, Maks called Ruben and said he needed an estimate on when they could start shelling, as “the phone [*calls from his commanders*] doesn’t stop ringing”. He instructed Ruben to ask “the battalion commander” for a time estimate. Ruben asked, and later replied to Maks that they also needed the temperature reading, which Maks provided. The time estimate to launch was reported to be “about 20 minutes”.

At 07:40, Gorets called Maks and asked for a realistic time estimate, as the earlier promised launch time had been breached, and “he must take responsibility for his words”. From the context, it became clear that Gorets referred to the Russian battalion commander, as he asked Maks to clarify if he was from the 5th or the 200th battery.

Shortly thereafter, Maks clarified that the delayed battalions were from the 5th battery. Furthermore, only one battalion from the 200th battery, accompanied by Ruben, reported to be ready to fire at 07:54; while the other, accompanied by an unidentified local commander with call sign “Rizhiy”, reported that “his brother” (referring to the Russian battalion commander from the 200th battery) needed another 10 minutes to prepare.

At 07:55, Maks reported to Gorets that one unit was finally ready. Gorets gave the command: “FIRE. FIRE.”

At approximately the same time, San Sanich and Voronezh instructed the battery of the DNR’s 9th Regiment to initiate artillery fire as well.

The Shelling of Mariupol

Between 08:01 and 08:10, Ruben reports to Maks that the first salvos have just been launched at targets 104, 106, and 102. Maks corrects Ruben that 102 should instead be 101. Ruben says the unit has already started shelling at target 102. Maks issues the command to continue firing.

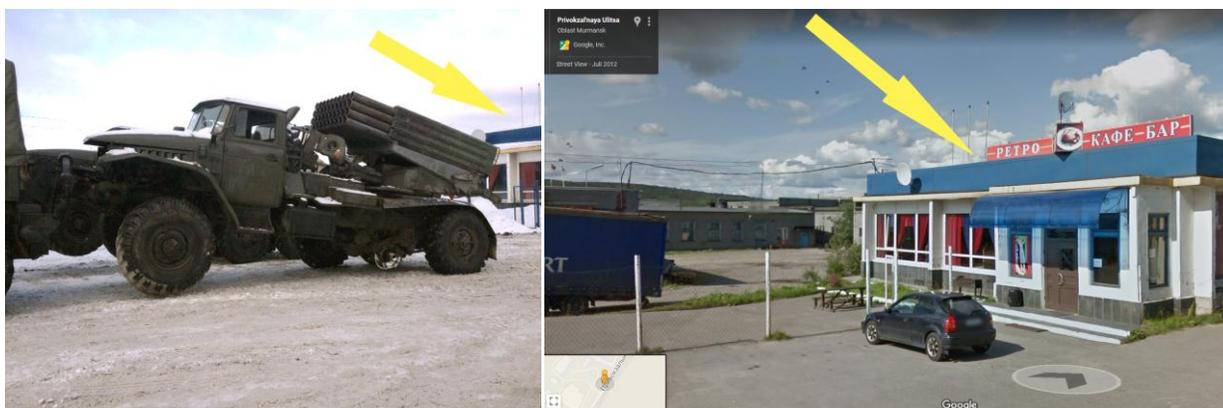
Shortly thereafter, Ruben reports that two out of the three launch units of the battalion under his supervision is out of commission due to a local collision between two transporting units.

Bellingcat has reviewed imagery of two GRAD (MLRS) systems loaded on URAL truck chassis that appear defective. The images were published on a local news site in Murmansk on 25 February 2015, a month after the Mariupol events, and were noticed by conflict-watchers²³. The original news story said that “passers-by photographed two GRADs which showed sign of damage, and towed with iron-cast couplers, with removed number plates.” The story has since been deleted by the Russian news site, but a copy was archived in 2015 by the Internet Archive Wayback Machine²⁴. Bellingcat has geolocated the exact spot shown in the photographs to a train station parking space in the village of Kola, a village near Murmansk. Kola is the home of artillery storage depot and is located near, and en route from the mainland to the base of the 200th Detached Motorized Artillery Brigade²⁵. Removal of license plates is standard practice for covert Russian military operations in Ukraine, as can be heard on a call to Gorets intercepted one week after the Mariupol shelling.

²³ <http://informnapalm.org/6357-poteryavshyesya-osenyu-proshlogo-goda-v-rostovskoj-oblasty-grady-nashlys-pod-murmanskom-v-podstrelennom-sostoyanyy/>

²⁴ <http://web.archive.org/web/20150225090626/http://severpost.ru/read/21468/>

²⁵ <http://voinskayachast.net/goroda/murmansk-i-murmanskaya-oblast>



Two GRAD systems near the train station of Kola, a village in the area of Murmansk, Russia, 25 February 2015.

At 08:14, Terek, returning from the border, reports that he is approaching Bezimmenne and is on the way to the launch site. Maks enquires where he left “the guys to work”, and Terek replies that “they are at Markino”. From the context, it becomes clear that they are discussing the reloading stations and personnel for the artillery battalions of the 5th battery. Maks tells Terek that Markino (which is located 25 km from Bezimmenne) is too far, and the teams will “burn all their gas shuttling back and forth all day”. Maks then instructs Terek to move them to a closer location, “at least one volley closer”. Terek asks for confirmation if this is acceptable to do in broad daylight; Maks says that “such are the commands from above”.

Just before 09:00, Terek reports to Maks that one of the two units in his battery is ready, while the other one will require a further 5 to 10 minutes. Terek asks for instructions whether fire should be of concentrated or “normal” pattern; Maks confirms it must be concentrated. Goretz instructs Maks that as soon as the two units are ready, they should report to him for firing commands.

At 09:07, while the second battalion of the 5th battery is not yet ready, Goretz gives command to start fire with the first battalion, and to catch up with the second one whenever ready. Goretz tells Maks that he “*must report to the Number One every movement in real time – reloading, movement towards the firing line, salvo completion*”.

Goretz instructs Maks and Terek to locate the “*top commander among the people who arrived*” and to ask if they have “Belozyor” with them. From the context, it becomes clear he is referring to a Russian-made portable encrypted communication system²⁶. One of the 5th battery battalion commanders – who introduces himself as ‘Alexey’ – tells Goretz that they did not bring Belozyor with them. Over the next two hours, Goretz frenetically tries to establish contact with the “most senior rank from the arrivals”, specifying that his name is “Lisai.”

²⁶ <http://safe-rgs.ru/1309-stanciya-sputnikovoy-svyazi-r-438m-belozer.html>

Ultimately, just after 11:00, Gorets establishes contact via GSM telephone with Colonel Lisai, who reports to Gorets that the 5th battery is just about ready to start firing. He also confirms to Gorets that they did not bring encrypted communication equipment from Russia. Gorets scolds Lisai, and instructs him to report on progress in real time, because *“absence of information stresses everyone, and they all are now screwing Stepan Stepanovich due to lack of progress updates. Hurry up!”*

At approximately 11:30, the second battery finally begins shelling. The two batteries follow the instructed pattern: a salvo round, then retreat for reloading at their respective reloading stations, and then return to the launching sites for further salvos.

From the conversations between Maks and his team, it becomes clear that the launch sites are not far from Bezimenne, and that the two battery launch sites are separated by approximately 2 km. This information is consistent with Bellingcat’s analysis of the most likely launch sites based on crater impact analysis, as well as with the OSCE SMM to Ukraine report from 24 January 2015, as described in Section One.

Targeting chaos

The intercepted calls from the first half of the day contain evidence of ongoing confusion and miscommunication about the targets, possibly exacerbated by the delayed arrival of one battery, the crash between two units in the other, and the lack of encrypted communication equipment, contrary to the expectations of Gorets. Furthermore, the calls indicate extreme pressure “from the top” on Gorets to deliver progress updates in real time, as well as general reluctance to inform the commanders upstream from Gorets about the delayed operational schedule.

Gorets requires others to inform him of the precise times each salvo starts in order for him to report it up his chain of command. Whenever the local team is unsure, or the time is delayed, Gorets and Maks fabricate precise time-checks – usually earlier than the real start time, and informs the artillery units to stick to this narrative. All time-checks are quoted in Moscow time, rather than local time, confirming the hypothesis that the reports are meant for a Russian chain of command.

In addition, at least one of the Russian units got lost during their reloading trip, causing Ruben to move away from the firing position in order to locate it.

The confusion may have been further exacerbated by the fact that in addition to the shelling by two Russian batteries, Gorets provides parallel shelling instructions – apparently for the same areas – to an independently operating local artillery commander with the call sign ‘Amur’. Amur may or may not have been part of the DNR’s 9th Regiment, supervised by Voronezh.

The first sign of targeting confusion appears at 09:55. When Maks instructs Terek to drop targets 108 and 111, and take target 107 instead, Terek counters that he already shelled 107, but Maks tells him he “overshot the target and must take it again.” In a follow-up call, Terek asks if the overshoot is by a lot, and Maks confirms *“yes, that flew very far, it’s a total mess.”* Terek asks how much the overshoot was. Maks says, *“I don’t know. But now keep going.”*

At 10:18, Terek calls Maks and says that he is confused about the target instructions. He asks if in addition to 107, he must proceed shelling target 108. Maks hands over the phone to the fire direction officer – call sign Pepel – who tells Terek that no, 108 has been dropped, and that he will give him a new target instead: “Instead of me dictating now new coordinates, take the old target 156, it’s nearby anyway”.

At 10:36, Pepel receives a call from one of the forward observers. The observer tells Pepel *“You were way, way, way too eager... .. missiles started hitting homes, 9-story residential buildings, private buildings, the Kyiv Market...”* Pepel asks him from what direction shelling came...The observer replies *“From the direction of Vinohradna”*, pointing to a southeastern direction, or in other words, a trajectory from Russian-controlled territory.

At 11:21, Maks calls Terek and asks to speak with Alexey, the newly arrived Russian unit commander. In a previous phone call that day, it becomes clear that Maks and Alexey know each other as their military service overlapped in two locations. Maks asks Alexey to *“double-check every ‘wheelbarrow’ during aiming, because our buddies are shooting across the whole city... The whole city is in flames”*. From the context of the call, it appears that Maks is denigrating Terek and his team.

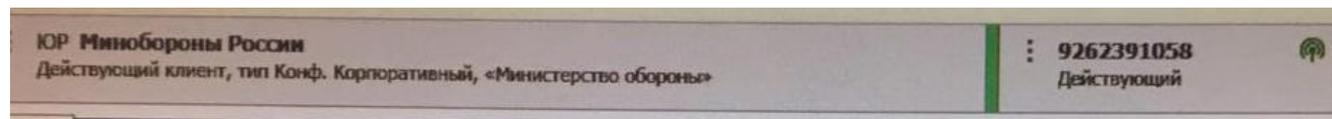
At 13:35, Pepel calls Terek and warns him that *“one of your machines is shooting with a very, very long overshoot”*. Terek asks which of the three machines that is, but Pepel says he cannot identify it. He says that all of his launchers are shelling on-target, and one shoots way off. Terek asks Pepel to inquire who tuned the artillery units, and whether they were even tuned before deployment.

Terek asks if he should continue with target 107, given the situation. Pepel confirms, but then tells Terek that he should re-aim all units 150 m to the right, as he was informed that that the center of impact dispersal even of the functioning launchers is 150 m to the left of target.

Hiding from the OSCE

At 14:12, Gorets receives a phone call from a Russian mobile number. Gorets answers with the words: *“There is no connection, there is no connection”*. The context suggests that the secure line with Russian command center is not functioning. The person on the other end of the line says: *“Gorets, listen to me carefully. Stop everything for now. And tell them go hide somewhere. Did you recognize me?”*. Gorets responds: *“Yes I recognized you, and I already received that information. I am giving the command”*.

Bellingcat has identified the phone number from which the call originated as belonging to the Russian Ministry of Defense.



Part of screenshot from a mobile phone record showing the number used by Stepan Stepanovich is registered in the name of the Ministry of Defense of Russia. The complete record is in possession of Bellingcat.

Furthermore, based on voice comparison with other calls, we have identified Gorets's interlocutor as General Major Stepan Stepanovich.

Several minutes after this call, the context of the emergency becomes clear. Maks calls Terek, Ruben, and Rizhiy to order an urgent retreat for both batteries. Maks commands them to hide all artillery units "because an OSCE commission is on the way". The initial instructions – given between 14:18 and 14:20 – are to take all units back to behind Markino, the home of a military base maintained by the pro-Russian forces in the DNR, and hide them in hangars.

About 10 minutes later, Maks conveys new instructions: the convoy of mobile units must be retreated to hangars, "avoiding public roads and making sure no one sees you". However, per the instructions, the "centipedes" must not be taken to hangars, but must instead be hidden in the forests. Maks explicitly instructs that the "centipedes" should not be driven on roads, but hidden piece-by-piece amidst the woods, with the officers remaining in them and awaiting further instructions.

In Russian army jargon, a centipede is a reference to a multi-wheel transporter for mobile artillery or anti-aircraft units. It is possible that the reason for the specific care taken with the transporters was that they would leave noticeable tracks on dirt roads. An alternative explanation is that they were of a type that Russia had not exported, and thus – if spotted by the OSCE – would serve as definitive proof of Russian military involvement in Ukraine. Notably, in early 2015, Russia had announced the completion of its secretive "Platform O"²⁷ Kamaz "centipede", which had not been seen in public until later that year.



Prototype of the KAMAZ Platform O, demonstrated by the Russian MoD in Nagorny Chalnah.

Just before 15:00, the risk from an OSCE inspection appears to have dissipated, as the command to hide the equipment is abruptly reversed. Maks calls Terek, Ruben, and Rizhy, and tells them to reverse course and head back to the reloading locations and await new instructions.

The new commands are different for each team. Initially at 15:20, Maks instructs his three commanders to hide the Russian units at the respective reloading locations until sunset,

²⁷ http://vpk.name/news/134411_mashinyi_platformao_razrabotki_kamaza.html

and then to escort them back to the border. Half an hour later, he calls Ruben and Rizhy with new instructions: to head back to the firing sites, and "make another salvo at the same targets you already covered". Terek – and his team from the 5th battery - is not given a new task, and is instructed to repatriate his group towards the border around 16:00.

During one of the calls, Ruben asks Maks if "*everything worked out okay with our work today*". Maks replies: "*Your part was okay*".

Back to Russia

At 16:01, Terek reports that he is already at Markino, and is expecting the last launchers from his unit to arrive so he can start the convoy back to Kuznetsi. At 16:30, Maks commands him to move immediately toward the border, and at 17:00 he reports he is already approaching it. Maks tells him to leave the Russian units there and to go find – and bring as quickly as possible – the other units to the border.

The other units report to Maks they have finished their follow-up work by 16:30, and start preparing for moving toward the border.

At 17:13, Gorets calls Maks and scolds him for taking too long to complete the "second half" of the job and repatriate. He tells him the other battery must be taken to the border as soon as possible and he should be informed.

At 17:40, Maks gets a report from Terek that the last launch-unit of the first battery (i.e. 200th battery) has crossed the border.

A few minutes before 18:00, Ruben informs Maks that the second battery (i.e. 5th battery) has arrived at the border and is ready to cross into Russia. Maks instructs him to inform the "top commander" of that battery to "cross the border, hide from sight, and wait there until further instructions."

At 17:57, Gorets calls Colonel Lisai:

Gorets: "Sergey...have you crossed over?"

Lisai: "Yes"

Gorets: "Stop there, and wait. Stepan Stepanovich has already started out in your direction"

Lisai: "Why? What has happened?"

Gorets: "Nothing...The instruction is to just cross over...and wait...You will get a new mission"

Lisai: "Shit...I am going nuts because of you guys"

Gorets: "Not because of us...Because of them...those fucking imbeciles...So just sit...and wait..."

Additional evidence of admission of responsibility

In addition to the intercepted conversations cited earlier, several further calls reconfirm the contemporaneous awareness by Russian officers that their artillery operation caused civilian deaths in Mariupol, and directly contradict Russia's official position that the casualties were caused by a "false-flag" operation by the Ukrainian Armed Forces. As an illustration, at 21:20 on the day following the operation, Maks received a report from call sign "Everest", an informer on the ground in Mariupol. Everest reported that he visited the sites that were fixed as targets yesterday. *"Our friends missed by a lot...totally unclear where they were aiming at...but you know, that's their problem"*, likely referring to the Russian batteries whose shelling caused the civilian casualties. Maks agrees.

Section Three : Identities of the Russian officers and militants involved in the Mariupol shelling

This part of the report describes the identities of nine Russian officers and two militants of the pro-Russian separatists, who were directly or indirectly involved in the shelling of Mariupol on 24 January 2015.

A Russian general and a Russian colonel were in charge of selecting and sending experienced artillery commanders on assignment to the DNR, and one Russian general was in direct command of the Russian officers who were based in the Donetsk region of Ukraine. These three officers communicated from Russia with the colonels stationed in Donetsk and Bezimenne, a village 20 km east of Mariupol. One Russian colonel supervised the transport of the two MLRS batteries to and from Ukraine.

Two Russian colonels, serving as commanders of artillery battalions in the Russian army, were based in Donetsk in 2015 and provided target instructions and firing commands. One Russian lieutenant-colonel and one Russian officer who was either a lieutenant colonel or a major at that time, both based in the Donetsk region in 2015, were directly in charge of the two Russia-provided MLRS batteries on the day of the Mariupol shelling. One other Russian lieutenant-colonel, based on Donetsk in 2015, commanded the synchronized shelling of Mariupol by two local batteries integrated in the DNR military structure.

Two militants identified by Bellingcat, one Russian and one Ukrainian, were in direct charge of artillery units that shelled Mariupol, and both of them simulated their deaths shortly after the Mariupol tragedy.

Bellingcat identified the Russian officers who were in charge on high and lower levels of the MLRS batteries on the day of the shelling at Mariupol, or provided target instructions from another location in Eastern Ukraine, as:

- Major General Stepan Stepanovich Yaroshchuk
- Alexander Iozhefovich Tsapliuk, call sign 'Gorets'
- Alexander Anatolevich Muratov
- Maksim Vladimirovich Vlasov, call sign 'Yugra'
- Sergey Sergeyeovich Yurchenko, call sign 'Voronezh'
- Alexander Valeryevich Grunchev, call sign 'Terek'

Bellingcat identified the Russian officers who were in charge of selecting and sending artillery commanders and artillery equipment to Eastern Ukraine as:

- Colonel Oleg Leargievich Kuvshinov
- Major General Dmitry Nikolaevich Klimenko
- Colonel Sergey Ivanovich Lisai

Bellingcat identified the two Russian and Ukrainian militants in direct charge of the artillery units that shelled Mariupol as:

- Alexander Mikhailovich Evtody, call sign 'Pepel'
- Grayr Manukovich Egiazaryan, call sign 'Shram'

Stepan Stepanovich Yaroshchuk

Bellingcat has identified Stepan Stepanovich Yaroshchuk as the direct superior of Gorets, as determined from intercepted phone calls between Gorets and Yaroshchuk, and Gorets and other commanders. In the calls, Gorets refers to Yaroshchuk as 'Stepan Stepanovich', 'the Commander', or 'The Number One'. In calls between San Sanich and other officers, the same terminology is used in relation to Stepan Stepanovich.

Bellingcat has identified the telephone number used by Stepan Stepanovich on 24 January 2015, which is registered to the Russian Ministry of Defense, and belongs to the Rostov numbering plan.

This determination of Major General Yaroshchuk as the senior-most Russian commander involved with the Mariupol attack does not contradict the 25 March 2016²⁸ determination from Ukrainian Defense Intelligence,²⁹ which stated that a major general of the Russian Armed Forces was directly responsible for the combat use of the missile troops in the occupied territories of Donbas, as well as shelling of the Ukrainian troops and civilians. We cannot confirm or refute this report from Ukrainian Defense Intelligence, but the commander we identified very likely is the same major general ascertained in 2016.

On 9 January 2011³⁰ by presidential decree, Stepan Stepanovich Yaroshchuk,³¹ then still a colonel, became Chief of the Missile Forces and Artillery of the Southern Military District in Rostov-on-Don, Russia. On 20 February 2013³² he was promoted to the military rank of major general, and still had that rank in 2016 as mentioned on the site of the Russian Ministry of Defense.³³

In an overview of alumni³⁴ of the Tbilisi Higher Artillery Command Red Banner of the Order of the Red Star School, Yaroshchuk is mentioned to have graduated from this education in 1985.

²⁸ <http://www.unian.info/war/1300357-ukraine-intel-names-russian-general-heading-missile-forces-in-donbas.html>

²⁹ <http://gur.gov.ua/en/content/viiskovyi-zlochynets-heneral-maior-zs-rf-iaroshchuk-stepan-stepanovych.html>

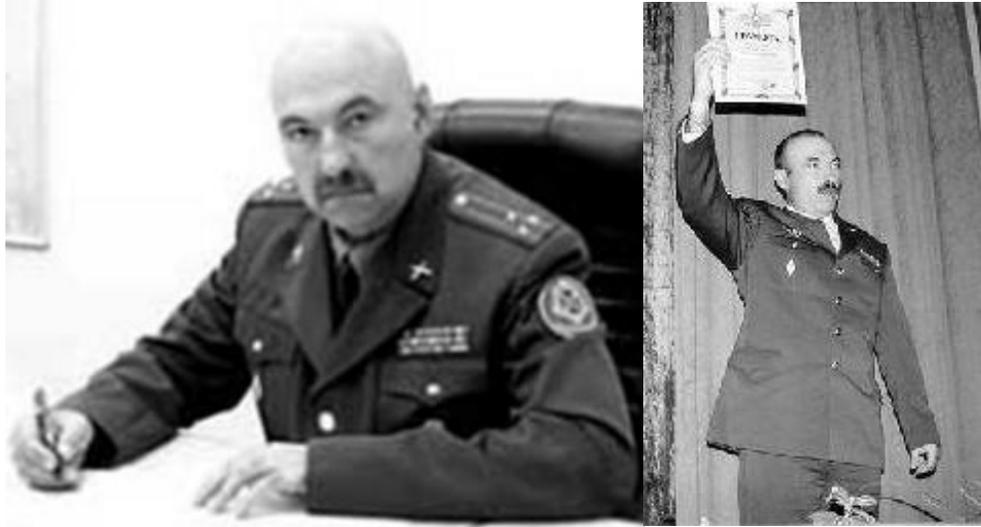
³⁰ <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/10032>

³¹ <http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/neistorik/post193587638/>

³² <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/36819>

³³ <http://ens.mil.ru/education/more.htm?id=12085363@egNews>

³⁴ <http://tvakku.ru/1/spisok.doc>



Left: Stepan Stepanovich Yaroshchuk, in this photograph still a colonel; right: Commander of the 147th Guards Self-Propelled Artillery Simferopolsky Regiment, S.S. Yaroshchuk, in 2002.³⁵

In 2005 Yaroshchuk lived in Kalininets,³⁶ in the Naro-Fominsky district, and was commander of military unit 34465,³⁷ or the 147th Guards Self-Propelled Artillery Simferopol Red Banner Order of Suvorov, Kutuzov and Alexander Nevsky Regiment, in Golitsyno near Kalininets at least from 2003³⁸ until at least 2016.³⁹ The 147th Guards Self-Propelled Artillery Simferopolsky Regiment changed its unit number in 2013 to military unit 73699⁴⁰ and that military unit is part of the 2nd Guards Taman Motorized Rifle Division, military unit 23626,⁴¹ also known as the Taman Division.

In 2015⁴² Yaroshchuk arrived in Syria for the post of Chief of the Missile Forces and Artillery of the Russian Armed Forces in Syria.

³⁵ <http://www.odintsovo.info/news/?id=42917>

³⁶ http://nomer-org.one/mosqibdd/lastName_Я_Р_ОИЦУ_К_firstName_С_Т_Е_П_А_Н_pagenumber_0.html

³⁷ <http://sbis.ru/contragents/5030021303/503001001>

³⁸ <http://info.1cont.ru/contragent/voyskovaja-chastjh-34465/>

³⁹ <http://www.prima-inform.ru/cat/cc/voyskovaya-chast-34465-1035005912061-5030021303>

⁴⁰ <http://mamasoldata.mybb.ru/viewtopic.php?id=416&p=44>

⁴¹ <http://voinskayachast.net/suhoputnie-voyska/motostrelkovie/vch23626>

⁴² <http://crime-ua.com/node/14705>

Alexander Iozhefovich Tsapliuk, call sign 'Gorets'

From the intercepted phone calls, Bellingcat identified that the birth date of Gorets, who was addressed in calls under the alias, Alexander Georgevich, is on 16 January. Furthermore, in one congratulatory phone call, a general tells Gorets "Welcome to our club of 50-year-olds", which identified his year of birth to be 1965. Because of his role as commander of an artillery unit and the fact his regular direct boss had the rank of major general, Bellingcat concluded that Gorets must have been a colonel in 2014/2015.

In intercepted calls from General Kuvshinov, who also is identified by Bellingcat and described later in this section, it became clear that Gorets was employed at the same military base as Kuvshinov, and was likely his close associate, as the latter tells him he "expects him back as soon as possible". This reduced the scope of search to colonels working closely with the Artillery Commander of the Western Military District.

Gorets was ultimately identified as Colonel Alexander Iozhefovich Tsapliuk,⁴³ born on 16 January 1965,⁴⁴ who served as an artillery commander in the same military unit as Major General Kuvshinov. He was deputy head, and later head, of the Training Center for the Combat Use of Missile Forces and Artillery of the Ground Forces (military unit 88612)⁴⁵ and deputy commander of the missile forces and artillery of the Western Military District.

In June 2015, after his return from Ukraine, Tsapliuk was appointed head⁴⁶ of the Penza Artillery Engineering Institute,⁴⁷ a branch of the Military Academy of Material and Technical Support⁴⁸ in St. Petersburg. After August 2016,⁴⁹ he was promoted to the rank of Major General.⁵⁰

⁴³ <http://penzaneews.ru/society/91595-2015> ; <http://archive.is/DliiY>

⁴⁴ http://nomer-org.cc/mosgibdd/lastName_IIAIIJIOK_pagenumber_0.html ; ; <http://archive.is/88okq>

⁴⁵ <http://voinskayachast.net/suhoputnie-voyska/raketnie-i-artilleriya/vch88612>
http://zachestnyibiznes.ru/company/ul/1095022003460_5022556792_FBU-VOYSKOVAYa-ChASTY-88612

⁴⁶

http://www.penzainform.ru/news/social/2015/06/26/nachalnikom_penzenskogo_artinstituta_stal_polkovnik_aleksandr_tcaplyuk.html ; <http://archive.is/bBCoA>

⁴⁷ <http://penza-press.ru/lenta-novostey/79997/dolzhnost-nachalnika-penzenskogo-artinstituta-zajmet-a-caplyuk> ; <http://archive.is/BxFSi>

⁴⁸ <http://vamto.net/filials/PFVAMTO/>

⁴⁹ <http://archive.is/jA1TO>

⁵⁰ http://vamto.net/about_university/command/ ; <http://archive.is/pBqpA>



Left: Alexander Iozhefovich Tsapliuk, Colonel, appointed head of the Penza Artillery Engineering Institute in June 2015; right: Alexander Iozhefovich Tsapliuk, Major General in 2018.

Bellingcat located four open source videos with speech samples of Alexander Tsapliuk. The first is a video uploaded in 2012, filmed at military unit 88612,⁵¹ the Training Center for the Combat Use of Missile Forces and Artillery of the Ground Forces. In the second video,⁵² uploaded in April 2017, Tsapliuk speaks at a 15 February 2017 meeting of Afghanistan war veterans at the Penza Artillery Engineering Institute.

Bellingcat and its partner McClatchy, using the services of the voice forensics department of the University of Denver, have confirmed that the voice in both videos is identical to that of Goretz.

In an intercepted call after his departure from Ukraine, General Stepan Yaroshchuk tells (Alexander) Muratov that "the Military Academy of Material and Technical Support is interested in our Alexander". In June 2015, Alexander Tsapliuk did indeed join the military academy.

⁵¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIAZ-9DgQBk&feature=youtu.be&t=337>

⁵² http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-_kzQ8M2lg&feature=youtu.be&t=183

Alexander Anatolevich Muratov, call sign “San Sanich”

On 24 January 2015, Alexander Muratov supervised the parallel, synchronized shelling operation at the targets in and around Mariupol by artillery batteries of the 9th Regiment of the DNR.

Bellingcat was able to identify ‘San Sanich’ as Lieutenant Colonel Muratov thanks to an intercepted phone call from his wife. Bellingcat identified the owner of that Russian phone number as a Russian officer serving in the medical unit of military base Totskoye-2. Based on media reports in the Russian press, Bellingcat determined that she was married to an artillery commander named Alexander Anatolevich Muratov working at the same base.

Notably, in one phone call, a subordinate refers to San Sanich not by his code name, or by his alternate code name Alexander Alexandrovich, but by Alexander Anatolevich. This lapse assisted Bellingcat in confirming the hypothesis San Sanich may be Muratov.

Bellingcat searched extensively for public appearances by Alexander Muratov in order to obtain a voice match with the intercepts of San Sanich. The only public speech located contained Muratov speaking at a festive event of the 385th Guards Artillery Brigade in 2016; however, the speech was superimposed by a TV narrator and the underlying voice could not be heard. Bellingcat applied a audio-enhancement method called *partial dephasing of the central audio channel* by which a short segment of Muratov’s voice could be obtained. The voice match, while not conclusive for forensic purposes due to the short segment of the 2016 speech, together with the remaining evidence, convinced Bellingcat that Alexander Muratov and San Sanich are the same person.

Alexander Anatolevich Muratov, then a Lieutenant Colonel, is mentioned as deputy commander of military unit 32755 in a court document from 18 May 2012.⁵³ This military unit is the 385th Guards Artillery Brigade,⁵⁴ located in Totskoye-2 near Orenburg, Russia. A 21 November 2014 post⁵⁵ on a forum about this military unit described Colonel Alexander Muratov as the brigade commander.

In 2016, the 75th anniversary of the 385th Guards Odessa Red Banner Order of Bogdan Khmelnytsky 2nd Class Artillery Brigade was celebrated, as described in a 27 June 2016 article⁵⁶ (that incorrectly says ‘389th’ instead of ‘385th’). The unit commander, Colonel Alexander Muratov, visible in one of the photographs⁵⁷ in the article. As made clear in the

⁵³ <http://docs.pravo.ru/document/view/27124291/27173873> ; <http://archive.is/QYSU2>

⁵⁴ <http://voinskayachast.net/suhoputnie-voyska/raketnie-i-artilleriya/vch32755>

⁵⁵ <http://mamasoldata.mybb.ru/viewtopic.php?id=388&p=23> ; <http://archive.is/KfWvN>

⁵⁶ <http://www.orenburg-gov.ru/news/official-chronics/gvardeytsy-voyskovoy-chasti-v-totskom-rayone-otmetili-75-letniy-yubiley/> ; <http://archive.is/EnEng>

⁵⁷ http://www.orenburg-gov.ru/upload/resize_cache/iblock/b91/450_299_1/b91ce902f3ebe70ab307f5489000f656.jpg ; <http://archive.is/832zw>

article, he was awarded a valuable gift during this event. Two videos⁵⁸ of this event, uploaded on YouTube, show Colonel Alexander Muratov several times, including giving a speech, but his voice is inaudible due to a voice-over.

Before he became commander of the 385th Guards Artillery Brigade, Muratov was temporarily acting commander of a Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment in Karabash, according to a now-deleted, but archived 2008 publication⁵⁹. Muratov's photograph was saved before the publication went offline. Most likely, this regiment is the 239th Self-propelled Artillery of the Order of the Patriotic War Regiment⁶⁰ in Karabash, near Chelyabinsk.



Left: Colonel Alexander Anatolevich Muratov, June 2016; right: Muratov in 2008, then Lieutenant Colonel.

⁵⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbApbkOr5yM&feature=youtu.be&t=95>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5dcDoBtt20&feature=youtu.be&t=60>

⁵⁹ http://web.archive.org/web/20130828165525/http://old.redstar.ru/2008/10/15_10/3_02.html

⁶⁰ <http://altyn73.livejournal.com/1317096.html>

Maksim Vladimirovich Vlasov, call sign ‘Yugra’

An officer referred to as Maks in telephone conversations and with the call sign Yugra is one of the two officers directly in charge of the two shelling batteries on the day of the Mariupol shelling. Bellingcat has identified this officer as Lieutenant Colonel Maksim Vladimirovich Vlasov.

Maks received telephone calls with birthday congratulations on 15 February, including one by an ice hockey coach from Chebarkul in the Chelyabinsk Oblast. The telephone number of his wife is connected to an advertisement from Kalininets and to the sale of an apartment in Chebarkul. Another person who called Maks is Oleg Aleksandrovich Tulinov,⁶¹ commander of the 275th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment, military unit 73941 (part of the 4th Fourth Guards Kantemirovskaya Tank Division,⁶² military unit 19612, in Naro-Fominsk).

On his birthday, Maks sent an SMS to a person named Vladimir Vlasov. A man with that name, living in Chebarkul, has a son named Maksim Vlasov, born on 15 February 1980. That man, apparently the father of Maks, attended the Khmelnytsky Higher Artillery Command School⁶³ in Ukraine in the 1970s and served in military unit 93215 in Chebarkul.

Two social media profiles of Maksim Vlasov⁶⁴ make clear that he was a major in an artillery regiment in 2010/2011 in Chebarkul, was promoted to lieutenant colonel in 2012, and was a goalkeeper for an ice hockey team in Chebarkul. A photograph from 17 November 2013 on his father’s profile shows him as an officer in the 275th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment in Naro-Fominsk.⁶⁵ He attended the Yekaterinburg Higher Artillery Command School from 1997 to 2002.

A YouTube video from 29 May 2013⁶⁶ shows Maksim Vlasov shouting in front of a room of soldiers. One comment on this video mentions ‘Maksim Vladimirovich’ being a commander in 2010/2011 in Chebarkul, and two other people mention him as a regiment commander in the Taman Division in 2015/2016. Because of Maksim’s shouting, a proper voice analysis with this sample is not possible; however, a comparison of his shouting voice with a frenetic telephone call on 24 January 2015 in which he also shouts provided sufficient additional comfort that this is the same person.

⁶¹ <http://kosdor.livejournal.com/31962.html> ; <http://archive.is/0itv1>

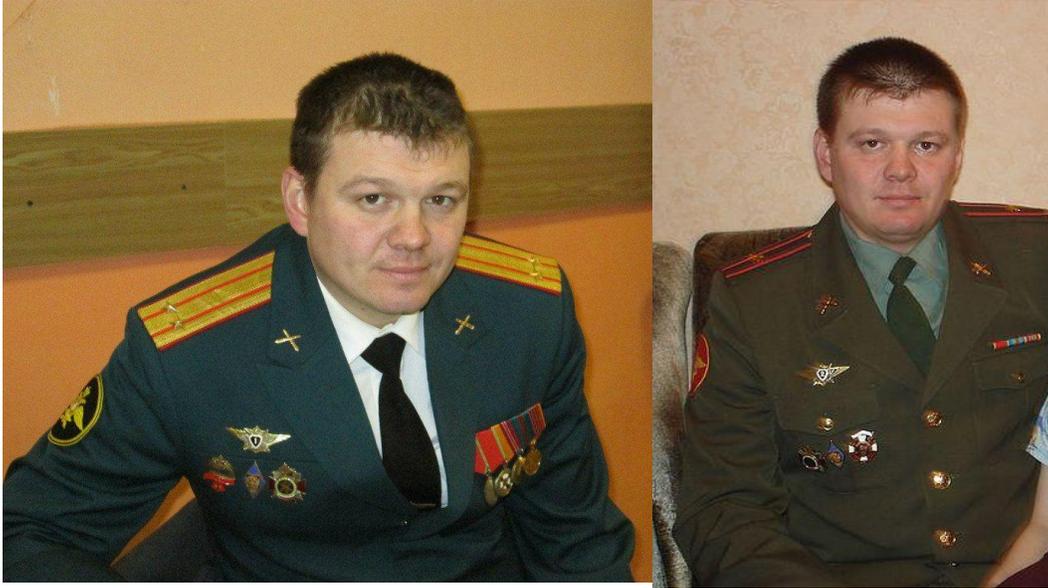
⁶² <http://voinskayachast.net/suhoputnie-voyska/tankovie/vch19612>

⁶³ http://sokrasheniya.academic.ru/20156/X_B_A_K_Y

⁶⁴ <http://www.ok.ru/profile/477033638156> ; <http://archive.is/gxeOR>
<http://www.ok.ru/profile/538313125270> ; <http://archive.is/AEw6o>

⁶⁵ <http://www.ok.ru/profile/348881613039/pphotos/535751862511> ; <http://archive.is/oZfeW>

⁶⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XejKKVSuaZE>



Left: Lieutenant Colonel Maksim Vladimirovich Vlasov, 24 November 2012.⁶⁷
Right: Maksim Vlasov, then still a major, 22 December 2010.⁶⁸



Maksim Vlasov, officer in in the 275th Self-propelled Artillery Regiment in Naro-Fominsk, 17 November 2013.

⁶⁷ <http://www.ok.ru/profile/538313125270/pphotos/461973845398> ; <http://archive.is/GGIXD>

⁶⁸ <http://www.ok.ru/profile/477033638156/pphotos/284626067724> ; <http://archive.is/ogJdQ>

One photograph⁶⁹ shows Maksim Vlasov at the military base of several military units in Chebarkul, including military unit 89547,⁷⁰ or the 7th Separate Guards Tank Brigade.⁷¹ A short part in a 2012 video⁷² filmed at the military base confirms the location, and a video, uploaded in 2013 but apparently filmed in August 2010,⁷³ shows the aforementioned video of Maksim Vlasov shouting in front of soldiers, with a comment added that Vlasov was a commander in the artillery battalion of unit 89547 in Chebarkul.



Lieutenant Colonel Maksim Vlasov at the military base of the 7th Separate Guards Tank Brigade, among other military units, in Chebarkul, photograph uploaded in June 2012.

⁶⁹ <http://www.ok.ru/profile/538313125270/pphotos/429114151062> ; <http://archive.is/IUwME>
<http://www.ok.ru/profile/348881613039/pphotos/461597563119> ; <http://archive.is/AoZqn>

⁷⁰ <http://voinskayachast.net/suhoputnie-voyska/tankovie/vch89547>

⁷¹ http://prizyvnikmoy.ru/publ/1/chebarkul_89547_71316_63494/2-1-0-9 ; <http://archive.is/kglpU>

⁷² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79I2U6TFv30&feature=youtu.be&t=198>

⁷³ http://vk.com/video188566326_165809368 ; <http://archive.is/gPDjt>

Sergey Sergeevich Yurchenko, call sign 'Voronezh'

Bellingcat has identified Sergey Sergeevich Yurchenko, who used the call sign 'Voronezh', as an officer in charge of the shelling batteries on the day of the Mariupol shelling.

One of the paths that led to the identification of Yurchenko was a March 2015 telephone call from Yurchenko to a woman using a Russian telephone number. The woman told Yurchenko that she will be waiting for him. Bellingcat located the woman's social media profile, where she described having a sibling named Sergey who lived in a village near Voronezh, but a contact address in Karabash, a village near Chelyabinsk. A man named Sergey Yurchenko is visible in many of photographs in her photo album on her social media profile. This same Yurchenko is also visible in many photographs in an album on one of Maksim Vlasov's two social media profiles⁷⁴. A few of the woman's photographs are geotagged in 'Totskoye-2', where the 385th Guards Artillery Brigade⁷⁵ is located, the unit whose commander is Colonel Alexander Muratov. One photograph, geolocated in Orenburg, shows the woman standing next to two parked cars - one with an Orenburg region car code and another with a Chelyabinsk region code. The car with a Chelyabinsk region code is registered to a man named Sergey Sergeevich Yurchenko.



Lieutenant Colonels Sergey Yurchenko (left) and Maksim Vlasov (right), photographs taken in a restaurant in St. Petersburg and uploaded in November 2012.

⁷⁴ <http://www.ok.ru/profile/538313125270/pphotos/461973845654> ; <http://archive.is/njmCr>
<http://www.ok.ru/profile/538313125270/pphotos/461973847190> ; <http://archive.is/STV1B>

⁷⁵ <http://voinskayachast.net/suhoputnie-voyska/raketnie-i-artilleriya/vch32755>



Yurchenko's wife standing next to a car with license 'k 001 om 174', registered to Sergey Sergeevich Yurchenko, photograph taken in Orenburg⁷⁶ and uploaded 24 September 2017.



Sergey Sergeevich Yurchenko, photograph from his wife's photo album, uploaded 24 September 2017.

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<http://www.google.com/maps/@51.7698879,55.1030552,3a,37.5y,208.97h,90.45t/data=!3m6!1e1!3m4!1sYzTCITpb0Mz886E5XyaruQ!2e0!7i13312!8i6656>

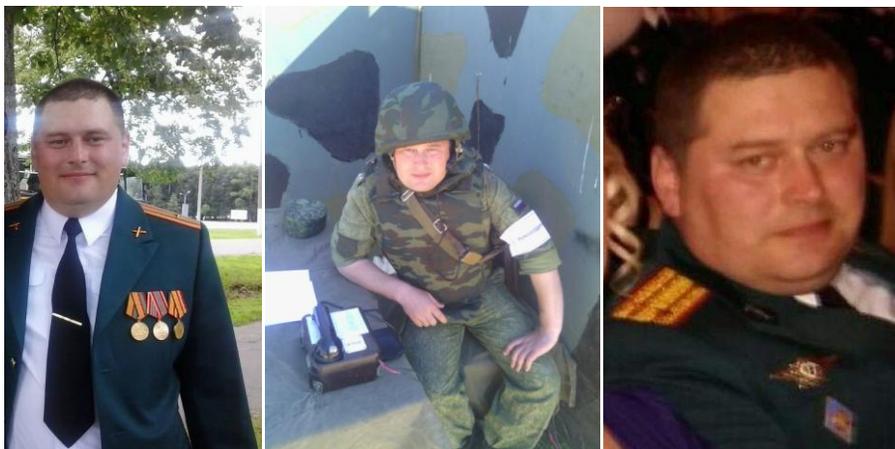
Alexander Valeryevich Grunchev, call sign 'Terek'

'Terek' was identified on the basis of a phone call he received from his wife. The wife's telephone number appeared in a reverse number search in a VOIP messenger, along with the owner's self-submitted photo and a family name 'Gruncheva'. A reverse image search of the photograph on the Russian image-search service FindFace⁷⁷ identified the owner of a VK account having the family name 'Gruncheva'. Among the contacts of that account, Bellingcat identified an account of her spouse, Alexander Grunchev, an artillery officer serving in the Russian army.

Bellingcat has identified Alexander Valeryevich Grunchev as the Russian officer who used the call sign 'Terek' and was in charge of one of the artillery batteries that shelled Mariupol in January 2015. His rank in January 2015 is not clear, as a photograph on one of his social media profiles of May 2015 shows he has the rank of lieutenant colonel, but photographs on the social media profile of his wife from 2012 show he held the rank of major.

According to one of his own social media profiles, Grunchev served in military unit 19612, or the 4th Fourth Guards Kantemirovskaya Tank Division (the same unit that Lieutenant Colonel Maksim Vlasov was in) from 2009 to 2013. His social media profiles also says he attended the Kazan Higher Artillery Command School⁷⁸ until 2000.⁷⁹

A photograph on his social media profile of May 2015 is geotagged near the 4th Fourth Guards Kantemirovskaya Tank Division, confirming that until at least May 2015 he was still a commander in that unit.⁸⁰



Alexander Valeryevich Grunchev, a major in 2012, lieutenant colonel in May 2015 and April 2016.

⁷⁷ <http://findface.ru>

⁷⁸ <http://vk.com/club24502216>

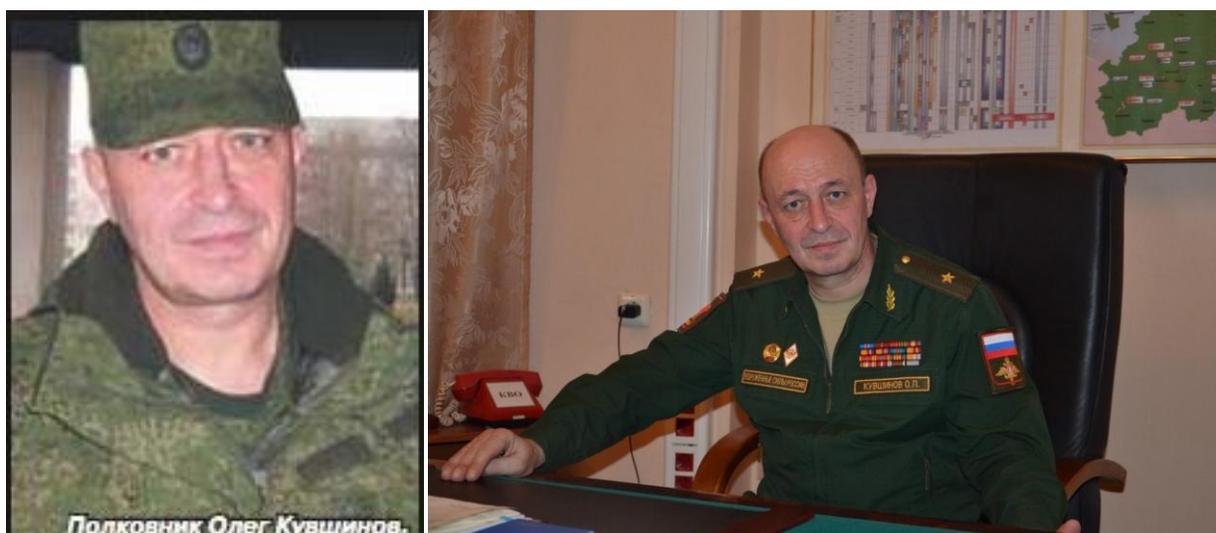
⁷⁹ <http://ok.ru/profile/343676987135> ; <http://archive.is/2wqYU>
<http://vk.com/id101079148> ; <http://archive.is/wbexH>

⁸⁰ http://vk.com/photo101079148_367013864 ; <http://archive.is/b6l0m>

Oleg Leargievich Kuvshinov

Gorets received phone calls repeatedly from an officer whom he addressed as 'Oleg Leargievich'. We have identified this officer as Oleg Leargievich Kuvshinov.⁸¹ It appears from the context of the phone calls that Kuvshinov is responsible for recruiting and "seconding" senior artillery officers to Eastern Ukraine. In particular, Gorets repeatedly asks Major General Kuvshinov if he has found a replacement for him, as Gorets appears eager to return to his regular job in Russia.

On 13 January 2011,⁸² Colonel Oleg Leargievich Kuvshinov was appointed Head of the Missile Forces and Artillery of the Western Military District, by presidential decree.



Left: Oleg Leargievich Kuvshinov, a colonel in 2011.⁸³
Right: Major General O.L. Kuvshinov, photograph uploaded in 2017.⁸⁴

Also by presidential decree, on 12 December 2013,⁸⁵ Kuvshinov was promoted to the rank of major general.

According to a publication from 19 November 2014,⁸⁶ Major General Kuvshinov performed the final inspections of the Missile Forces and Artillery of the Western Military District after the joint command-staff exercise 'Vostok-2014',⁸⁷ held from 19 to 25 September 2014.

⁸¹ <http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/neistorik/post193587638/> ; <http://archive.is/bb0gD>

⁸² <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/10062>

⁸³ <http://www.ok.ru/igor.sugak/pphotos/813862804350> ; <http://archive.is/3zdBV>

⁸⁴ <http://www.ok.ru/igor.sugak/pphotos/855795533950> ; <http://archive.is/ssB4W>

⁸⁵ <http://docs.pravo.ru/document/view/49640665/56449012/>

Major General Oleg Kuvshinov supervised the final check for the summer period of training of the units of the Western Military District's Missile Forces and Artillery, according to a publication from the Russian Ministry of Defense on 16 October 2015.⁸⁸

According to Kuvshinov's social media profile, he was born on 21 March 1964, lives in Voronezh, and attended education at the Military Academy of the General Staff in Moscow from 2005 to 2007.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ <http://conjuncture.ru/matveevskiy-19-11-2014/> ; <http://archive.is/Nn8oC>

⁸⁷ http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20140923/1025254315.html

⁸⁸ http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12061043@egNews ; <http://archive.is/gqvLY>

⁸⁹ <http://www.ok.ru/profile/331198372325> ; <http://archive.is/WzjBq>

Dmitry Nikolaevich Klimenko

On the birthday of Gorets, 16 January, one of the people who congratulated him is a man who introduced himself as 'Colonel Klimenko'. Gorets addressed this man as 'Dmitry'. The telephone number he called from is registered in the Khabarovsk region, in the far east of Russia.

This person is identified as Major General Dmitry Nikolaevich Klimenko,⁹⁰ who in early 2015 was still a colonel and, since February 2014, was the Chief of the Missile Forces and Artillery of the Eastern Military District, headquartered in Khabarovsk. In 2015, he became commander of the Missile Forces and Troops of the Euphrates group in Syria.

According to a publication from 19 November 2014,⁹¹ Colonel Dmitry Klimenko performed the final inspections of the Missile Forces and Artillery of the Eastern Military District after the joint command-staff exercise 'Vostok-2014',⁹² held from 19 to 25 September 2014.

It appears from the context of the phone calls that Klimenko is responsible for recruiting and "seconding" senior artillery officers to Eastern Ukraine. Both Muratov and Gorets ask Klimenko about the status of finding replacement for their respective positions in Eastern Ukraine.



Dmitry Nikolaevich Klimenko, awarded with the title 'Hero of the Russian Federation' and a higher rank of lieutenant colonel on presidential decree on 21 February 2000.

⁹⁰ http://www.warheroes.ru/hero/hero.asp?Hero_id=11478 ; <http://archive.is/kPkad>

⁹¹ <http://conjunction.ru/matveevskiy-19-11-2014/> ; <http://archive.is/Nn8oC>

⁹² http://ria.ru/defense_safety/20140923/1025254315.html ; <http://archive.is/nr30v>

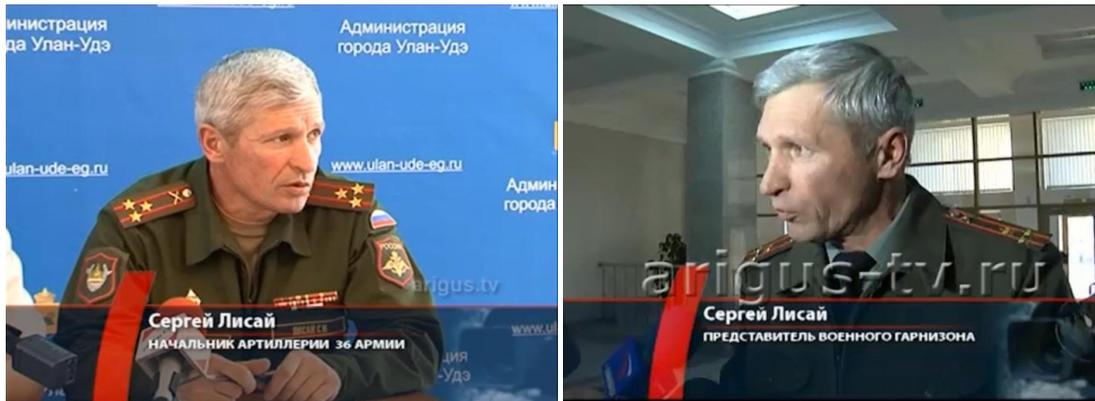
Sergey Ivanovich Lisai

Colonel Lisai supervised the dispatch from Russia to, and return from, Eastern Ukraine of the 200th battery that took part in the shelling of targets in Mariupol on 24 January 2015.

The Russian commander who arrived with the artillery batteries the evening before the shelling of Mariupol has been identified by Bellingcat as Colonel Sergey Ivanovich Lisai. Colonel Sergey Ivanovich Lisai is described in a 2010 article⁹³ as the Chief of the Missile Forces and Artillery of the Combined Arms Association in the Siberian Military District and in a 2012 article⁹⁴ as the Chief of the Missile Forces and Artillery in the Eastern Military District.

Two May 2014 parade videos,⁹⁵ filmed in Ulan-Ude, show an interview with Colonel Sergey Lisai, described as commander of artillery for the 36th Combined Arms Army.⁹⁶ Also a 2012 video,⁹⁷ from the same news agency, shows an interview with Sergey Lisai as representative of the military garrison, and a 2013 video⁹⁸ shows an interview with Colonel Sergey Lisai, Chief of the Missile Forces and Artillery Association.

Bellingcat and its partner McClatchy conducted a validation of the telephone against public samples of the voice of Colonel Lisai and obtained a sufficient voice match to conclude definitively this is the same person.



Left: Colonel Sergey Lisai, Chief of Artillery of the 36th Army, May 2014.
Right: Colonel Sergey Lisai, representative of the military garrison, December 2012.

⁹³ <http://www.sibcity.ru/?news=24217&line=people> ; <http://archive.is/8ESWl>

⁹⁴ <http://archive.redstar.ru/index.php/advice/item/6065-artilleriya-odna-ne-voyuet> ; <http://archive.is/pEcca>

⁹⁵ <http://arigus.tv/news/item/64822/> ; <http://archive.is/qE5JL>
<http://arigus.tv/news/item/64895/> ; <http://archive.is/yFThR>

⁹⁶ <http://ens.mil.ru/education/higher/more.htm?id=11249@morfOrgEduc> ; <http://archive.is/X7al6>

⁹⁷ <http://arigus.tv/news/item/27011/> ; <http://archive.is/R9XXA>

⁹⁸ <http://03.mchs.gov.ru/pressroom/news/item/1414498/> ; <http://archive.is/NVMYC>

Alexander Mikhailovich Evtody, call sign 'Pepel'

A Ukrainian militant using the call sign Pepel was the officer in charge of target direction of the shelling of Mariupol. An intercepted phone call between him and another person involved in the shelling of Mariupol named Sergey Ponomarenko was leaked to media on 24 January 2015,⁹⁹ the day of the shelling. Bellingcat has confirmed the authenticity of this call which was also identified in the database reviewed for this report. According to a detained spotter named Valery Kirsanov,¹⁰⁰ Pepel was a Russian officer.¹⁰¹ However, Bellingcat has identified Pepel as Alexander Mikhailovich Evtody, a Ukrainian citizen from Makiivka, born at 29 October 1991, with his last confirmed residence in Donetsk, Ukraine.

According to several reports in separatist and Russian media, including a statement by the then-head of Ukraine's SBU Nalivaychenko, Alexander Evtody was killed on 2 February 2015¹⁰² on the Mariupol-Novoazovsk front.¹⁰³ Intercepted phone calls from after 2 February make clear he did not die on the front, but instead clumsily staged his own death after the Mariupol tragedy. Evtody has at least eight social media profiles,¹⁰⁴ and he logged in on three of them between February and April 2018. A militia commander with the same call sign, 'Pepel', was involved in the shelling of Ukrainian soldiers near Snizhne, Ukraine, on 11 August 2014,¹⁰⁵ according to two Russian news outlets.¹⁰⁶ A now-deleted¹⁰⁷ Lifenews¹⁰⁸ video filmed in Miusynsk, a village near Snizhne, was very likely related to the 2014 shelling.

⁹⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPC0s09LgtU&feature=youtu.be&t=25>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXpXmkBKubw>

¹⁰¹ <http://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/war-against-ukraine/sbu-says-it-has-proof-russian-military-were-behind-mariupol-shelling-that-killed-30-people-video-378455.html> ; <http://archive.is/l5bMS>

¹⁰² <http://poisk.derzhava.today/pogibshie/1250/show> ; <http://archive.is/wvNTO>

¹⁰³ <http://gruz200.zzz.com.ua>

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.ok.ru/profile/555684851968> ; <http://archive.is/ahCiy>
<http://www.ok.ru/profile/514960270305> ; <http://archive.is/sjAyH>
<http://vk.com/id468930347> ; <http://archive.is/lzX6w>
<http://vk.com/id137199886> ; <http://archive.is/tLGyh>
<http://vk.com/id17107355> ; <http://archive.is/R3DiA>
<http://vk.com/id289998637> ; <http://archive.is/bScvL> ; <http://vk.com/peppell> ; <http://archive.is/qtsFt>
<http://vkfaces.com/vk/user/peppell> ; <http://archive.is/SV22y>
<http://vk.com/id72376399> ; <http://archive.is/oXPjH>
<http://vk.com/id13525755> ; <http://archive.is/l47Be> ; <http://vk.com/hate.slayer> ; <http://archive.is/kVE4y>

¹⁰⁵ <http://riaan.ru/50185-artilleriya-dnr-razbila-ukrainskie-chasti-pod-snezhnyim> ; <http://archive.is/Z89pG>

¹⁰⁶ <http://life.ru/t/новости/138221> ; <http://archive.is/8blqS>

¹⁰⁷ <http://military-az.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=1501&start=2920> ; <http://archive.is/NkRSx>

¹⁰⁸ <http://life.ru>

Though the video has been deleted by Lifenews, a screenshot of the video that has been saved clearly shows the commander of target direction with call sign Pepel. The photograph of the aforementioned death report of Pepel along with several social media pages of Alexander Evtody show the same man. Additional evidence surrounding the activities of Pepel is provided by a hacked cache of files, as detailed in the following section.



Militia commander of mortar calculation, call sign 'Pepel', filmed in Miusynsk, a village near Snizhne, Ukraine.



Left: Alexander Evtody, from the Novorossia death report, photograph from 2014 or 2015.
Right: Alexander Evtody on his own social media, photograph from 2009 or earlier.

Bellingcat's investigation team approached the person operating one of the social accounts associated with Alexander Evtody, which was still active at press time. To do this, Bellingcat set up a VK social media account using a photo of Maxim Vlasov, Pepel's former commander, and a random name, after which we requested to be added as Pepel's contact. Within a few hours, Alexander Evtody contacted the profile of who he thought was Maxim Vlasov and shared his new phone number.

Bellingcat called Evtody and asked for an interview. While Evtody deferred the request to later and then switched off his phone, Bellingcat obtained sufficient voice sample to conclude definitively Alexander Evtody and Pepel are the same person.

Grayr Manukovich Egiazaryan, call sign 'Shram'

Bellingcat has identified the Russian militant directly involved with the shelling of Mariupol with the call sign 'Shram' as Grayr Manukovich Egiazaryan.

An article on a Mariupol news site¹⁰⁹ claims that on 27 February 2015, a Russian mercenary named Grayr Egiazaryan from Kaliningrad with the call sign Shram was killed near Mariupol. Egiazaryan was allegedly involved in military actions on behalf of the DNR and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR). According to a death report,¹¹⁰ Grayr Egiazaryan was born on 4 February 1983. The Mariupol news article describes that his death was reported by a relative named 'Chen Egiazaryan', but included a screenshot from a social media profile of a person named 'Cheh Egiazaryn'. An archived version¹¹¹ of the social media profile of this person shows that he was born on 4 February 1983 and comes from Kaliningrad, matching the biographical details of Grayr Egiazaryan himself. However, it is possible that someone else with access to his social media account reported his death from this account.

Several social media profiles on Vkontakte,¹¹² Odnoklassniki,¹¹³ and Facebook¹¹⁴ confirm Egiazaryan's birthdate of 4 February 1983, along with his previous residence in Kaliningrad before he went to Eastern Ukraine. The profiles also detail how he lived in Minsk, Belarus in 2010. The last login for these profiles is for the Odnoklassniki account in 2016. The profiles also describe how he served from 2002 to 2003 in military unit 46111, or the 595th Separate Disciplinary Battalion¹¹⁵, in the Rostov Oblast. This is a special battalion in the Russian Armed Forces for servicemen convicted of criminal offenses during military service.

¹⁰⁹

http://mariupol.tv/news/war/mariupol/2981/pod_mariupolem_pogib_eshe_odin_rossijskij_naemnik_foto.html ; <http://archive.is/AEGtu>

¹¹⁰ <http://nekropole.info/ru/Grajr-Egiazaryan> ; <http://archive.is/FRZwX>

¹¹¹ <http://web.archive.org/web/20140703125102/http://vk.com/egiazaryn>

¹¹² <http://vk.com/id60731836> ; <http://archive.is/4eNT2>

¹¹³ <http://ok.ru/profile/355740585277> ; <http://archive.is/Jmgkq> ; <http://archive.is/p3O5P>

¹¹⁴ <http://www.facebook.com/cheh83> ; <http://archive.is/Ewa5o>

¹¹⁵ <http://army-news.ru/2011/09/disciplinarnyj-peredel/> ; <http://archive.is/OLeaZ>



Left and middle: photographs of Grayr 'Shram' Egiazaryan, published on 14 March 2015,¹¹⁶ after his presumed death; right: Grayr Egiazaryan on his Facebook profile, April 2012.

Hacked personal correspondence of Mikhail Polynkov, a separatist leader from Moscow, show that Shram contacted separatist forces on 15 August 2014¹¹⁷ to present himself as candidate and makes clear that his full name is Grayr Manukovich Egiazaryan and that he served in military unit 37551 in Sertolovo, near St. Petersburg. He refers to a V Kontakte profile that has since been deleted, but was archived by V kfaces.¹¹⁸

Additional messages,¹¹⁹ from the same hacked correspondence, show that Egiazaryan and Alexander Evtody (Pepel) asked separatist leaders for help on 4 January 2015 with the transport of the body of a killed mercenary to Russia and forgery of the death certificate. The militant, who came from Azerbaijan, could not be returned from Ukraine due to Azerbaijan's laws.

A YouTube video of October 2015¹²⁰ shows the unit of an officer with the call sign Shram where the voice of the officer is audible. Bellingcat has identified a former Minsk-based colleague of Egiazaryan who has confirmed that the voice from the intercepted calls belongs to him.

¹¹⁶ http://twitter.com/666_mancer/status/576669402747314176

¹¹⁷ http://ruh8.info/vkd/?action=messages&uid=6117102&uid_msg=265191464#1409056036 ;
<http://archive.is/OqauA>

¹¹⁸ <http://vkfaces.com/vk/user/id70222901> ; <http://archive.is/GO1Wt>

¹¹⁹

http://ruh8.info/vkd/?uid=6117102&action=messages&id=0&uid_msg=234346699&chat_id=0&offset=3501#1420432884 ; <http://archive.is/4qTsw>

http://ruh8.info/vkd/?action=messages&uid=6117102&uid_msg=170222901 ; <http://archive.is/rXQO4>

¹²⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4s4iV28qlml>

Conclusion

In this report, Bellingcat assessed raw primary audio, photo and video evidence, and conducted its own investigation from open and closed sources, to reconstruct the events leading to civilian casualties during the shelling of Mariupol on 24 January 2015.

Bellingcat's initially assessed photo and video evidence from the day of shelling, as drone video footage from the day after shelling, and satellite photography data, to establish the direction and source of fire. Bellingcat concluded that it is beyond reasonable doubt that the missile fire that affected the residential areas in the Vostochny district of Mariupol came from an easterly direction, and with very high probability from an area 3 to 10 km north-east of the village of Bezimenne. At the time of shelling that area was under control of Russian and/or separatist military structures.

Bellingcat then proceeded to analyze raw telephone call audio and metadata to reconstruct the events leading to the loss of life on 24 January 2015. Based on this analysis, Bellingcat's conclusion is that on the day before the shelling of Mariupol, commands were given from structures in the Russian Ministry of Defense to prepare and initiate an massive attack on targets in or in the the outskirts of Mariupol. To this purpose, two batteries armed with a total of 12 MLRS launch units were shipped across the Russian-Ukraine border during the night and early morning of 23 January/24 January 2015. These two batteries, escorted and supplemented by local officers also under Russian command, discharged between 3 and 4 salvos each at a minimum of 8 targets. A local battery containing an unknown number of launch units, also under Russian military command, discharged coordinated salvos at the same or partly overlapping targets.

Due to encrypted geographic coordinates used in instruction of targets to the launch unit commanders, Bellingcat could not determine the exact nature and location of the intended targets. However, due to the high concentration of missile hits in an area of approximately 1.3 sq. km. in a residential area in the eastern-most part of Mariupol, it can be concluded that the targets were in the outskirts of the city. Furthermore, the degree of precision of salvo fire by MLRS of the BM-21 type leads the reporting team to conclude that any targeting at a location in the outskirts of a town would have assumed the plausible loss of civilian life.

Last, Bellingcat focused on identifying key perpetrators of the shelling of Mariupol. To do so, the team used call metadata and contextual call data such as social clues, to derive a long-list of potential suspects. Furthermore, social media analysis and inspection of phone ownership records and other open and partly closed sourced databases permitted Bellingcat to identify eleven of the key participants. These include nine senior Russian officers and two militants, one of which a Russian citizen and the other a Ukrainian citizen.

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