

Coalition of Families of Korean and Cold War POW/MIAs

The U.S. /Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs Plenum (November 2018)

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The U.S./Russia Joint Commission on POWs and MIAs (USRJC) was established in 1992 to determine the fate of missing servicemen from both countries from WWII onward. The 2018 plenum/conference took place in Washington, DC, at the end of November. Leadership from family groups and veterans' organizations were invited to attend. The *Coalition* was among them.

The plenum covered a full day at the National Archives. Surrounding the conference were several dinners, the first presented by the U.S. on the evening prior to the conference. The Russians hosted a reception at the *Russian Cultural Center* on the following evening. The *VFW* held a closing event.

On the day of the conference, representatives of both nations met in a room at the National Archives building. The backgrounds of members from both countries are in the military and in research. A rectangle of four long tables, two on each side, pushed together, were the initial meeting ground. The Russian leadership and their translators were on one side. The U.S., along with their translators, were across the tables. Supporting staff sat along the walls. It was a reunion, of sort for many who have worked together over the years. They were happy to see each other and demonstrated sincere dedication to their work. The prevailing personality was of cooperation, unity, and friendship.

Later in the day, working groups covering WWII, Korean War, Cold War, and Vietnam War met in break-out rooms. Prior to the leaving Russia for the plenum, some of the Russian members visas were denied by the U.S. The source and reasons for the denials were undetermined at the time, but were generally attributed to the larger political climate between the two nations; a tit-for-tat response to an earlier action by Russia. Unfortunately, the people involved headed POW/MIA working groups. Their expertise was missing with them.

USRJC Plenum Notes

The following are notes taken by the Coalition. Please keep in mind that they were written while exchanges went back and forth between translators. It was often a challenge to keep up. It was warming though to watch while someone from one side said something humorous, and all the folks speaking that language laughed, then everyone waited while the interpreter translated, at which time the other folks laughed. A common sense of humor, delayed only by language.

In general, the U.S. is pursuing information in archival records from the four conflicts held by Russia in the National Archives in Podolsk and other collections proving to be less accessible. Russia is pursuing the answers to MIAs lost during their war in Afghanistan and World War II, particularly information in German records that were captured by the U.S. following WWII. The working groups covering each conflict also meet independently as Tech Talks, approximately four times each year.

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Opening Session

- * U.S. commissioners Congressman Brad Wenstrup (OH) and Sen. Mansion (WV) attended the opening remarks then left for Capitol Hill.
- * The Russians presented the National Archives archivist a 100-year-old U.S. map printed in Russia.
- * New Russian commissioners are being appointed to fill open positions.
- * A great deal of time was spent working out arrangements to cover the missing Russians leading their prospective working group. Their replacements did their best but weren't as up on reporting as the true heads of the group would have been.

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Cold War Working Group

- * The Russians discussed 264 of their MIAs in Afghanistan. They want to search an area controlled by US troops and asked for U.S. support during the search. The U.S. agreed.
- * Discussed process for agreeing on new Russian archivists to work in the U.S. as trusted agents.
- * The U.S. had requested submarine logs for those ships monitoring U.S. surveillance planes. The Russians have been searching certain archives. A problem is that they aren't sure which subs were doing the tracking.
- * The U.S. gave nine files for the Russians to learn about.

(Note: The Cold War working group overlapped the beginning of the Korean War group. Notes on the second half are forth-coming.)

Korean War Working Group

(The Russian leader of the group seemed to be figuring out things as he went along. He apparently was filling in for the regular head, whose visa was denied.)

- * A previous U.S. request was to access *finding guides* to Soviet operating units during the Korean War. Russian archivists found eleven collections, including three search light units. They are currently under declassification process, which should be finished by the end of the year.
 - * There are 291 finding guides (inventory sheets) for 862 files.
 - * When cleared, U.S. archivists will look at the inventory sheets, then request files they want. Russian archivists will research those records. (This is as best as I got it.)

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* Earlier requests for information on 12 individual cases had included Capt. Moore and Sgt. Joseph Dougherty. Russians searched Ministry of Defense files but not KGB. Cases for Capt. Tenny (sp?) and Lt. Robert Nieman - had been submitted, as well.

(Note: It was difficult to follow what may have been learned, particularly with Nieman. Tenny's (?) Russian file appeared to be classified.)

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*The Russians prepared 26 files, including those from Soviet operational groups. U.S. has read the summaries. Some 64th squadron records are still classified (requests have been denied), 2 files have been partially declassified.

*U.S. POWs captured by Soviet units (in North Korea) may be mentioned in reports taken during their debriefing, but those won't reflect what happened to them later on.

*The Russians mentioned that they don't hold anything back about Russian interrogations. Reports in Russian were sometimes taken first hand by Chinese or North Koreans who spoke/wrote Russian.

* The Russian Korean War group research is done in the Ministry of Defense (Podolsk).

*A list of U.S. crash site incidents (#?) was given to the Russians, who will pass it to archivists.

*Russians photos of crash sites have previously been turned over to the U.S. They have been shared with the families, unless they included overly graphic imagery of a loved one's death from the crash. They include plane tail numbers.

(Note: Russian pilots were awarded money for shoot downs. Along with technical interest, verifying these shoot downs was why Russian ground units would seek out the sites.

*The Russian head of the working group stated emphatically (in Russian): Mass transfer of U.S. POWs is a fairy tale.

*Soviet units moved around North Korea during the war. Associated files may not have gone with them. ie - Military medical archives.