

**U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs (USRJC)
Vietnam War Working Group (VWWG)
Technical Talks
June 21, 2019
Arlington, Virginia, USA**

SUMMARIZED MINUTES

U.S. Side Participants:

- Mr. Kelly M. McKeague
U.S. Commissioner to the USRJC representing the Department of Defense
U.S. Chairman, USRJC Vietnam War Working Group
Director, Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA)
- Mr. Rich Lyda
Chief, Joint Commission Support Division, DPAA
- Lead Analyst, USRJC Vietnam War Working Group, DPAA
- Interpreter, Joint Commission Support Division, DPAA
- Vietnam War Subject-Matter Expert/Casualty Resolution Specialist, DPAA

Russian Side Participants:

- Colonel Eduard A. Paderin
Russian Commissioner, USRJC
Deputy Russian Chairman, USRJC Vietnam War Working Group
Chief, Archival Service, Russian Armed Forces
- Acting Chief, Washington Office, Russian Side of the USRJC
- Researcher, Washington Office, Russian Side of the USRJC

Following introductions, the issues below were discussed.

1. Procedure for Scheduling USRJC Annual Engagements.

Background: In 2017, the USRJC Co-Chairmen discussed addressing higher-level issues during the annual Plenum and discussing operational matters during Technical Talks and support staff/subject-matter-expert (SME) meetings. In 2018, the U.S. Side's requests for SME meetings were denied or remained unanswered, as well as a request for a VWWG Co-Chairmen meeting. One of the objectives of these Technical Talks was to clarify the procedure for scheduling engagements.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin explained that the Directorate for Perpetuating the Memory of Those Fallen in the Defense of the Fatherland ("Directorate") of the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD) was designated as a point of contact for all USRJC matters. Every autumn, the Directorate plans all MoD engagements for the year ahead, including those for USRJC. The Deputy Chief of the General Staff and the First Deputy to the Minister of Defense are the ultimate approvers of the engagement schedule. In September of each year, the U.S. Side should forward a consolidated request for engagements by all four USRJC working groups to the USRJC Russian Executive Secretary for inclusion in the MoD plan for the year ahead. Colonel Paderin suggested that beyond the normal regime of annual Technical Talks and Plenums, additional "working" meetings be included in the consolidated proposal so that they can be incorporated in the official schedule for approval by the Russian MoD. He stated that these meetings could be used as placeholders and would be used as/if needed, with the specific dates to be determined later by agreement of the Sides. Colonel Paderin emphasized that he is not authorized to interact with representatives of foreign governments outside of officially sanctioned and scheduled engagements. The same is true for SME-level meetings and telephonic communication. Colonel Paderin does have authority to hold working meetings with the U.S. Side's contract researchers in Moscow as they are Russian citizens.

2. Access to Restricted Archives Challenges; Declassification.

Background: Records of interest to the U.S. VWWG might be held in restricted archives, such as Security Service (FSB) and Military Intelligence (GRU). Since those archives are not accessible to U.S. researchers, the U.S. Side has continuously requested that the Russian Side facilitate access to them and conduct research using Russian archivists. Mr. McKeague asked about status of access to those archives.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin has authority only over Russian Armed Forces Archives. He does not have access to the archives that belong to other agencies, be it the GRU, FSB, or any other. He suggested that the U.S. Side submit requests, routed through the Russian Executive Secretary, directly to the USRJC Russian Commissioners who represent those archives. He also noted, that besides the requirement for appropriate clearance level to view classified records in general, one also needs permission for access to particular archives and facilities. For example, GRU employees cannot freely conduct research in archives under the authority of Colonel Paderin without specific permission, even if they have the appropriate clearances; the same is true about his own employees' access to GRU archives.

3. Russian Archival Research Methodology.

Background: During the past two years, the U.S. Side provided detailed circumstances of loss for a number of specific incidents and requested any relevant information found in Russian archives. In order to aid Russian archivists conducting searches, the U.S. Side also provided broader datasets with information on U.S. personnel missing from the Vietnam War.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin explained that the structure of archival holdings does not allow for a by-name, by-case, or by loss-incident search as often was requested by the U.S. Side, since the records are not stored alphabetically or chronologically. As of now, Colonel Paderin has sufficient information from the U.S. Side to continue work. Any search is conducted by identifying a particular unit that took part in the conflict and looking through all of the reports that a particular unit sent to the archives for storage. Russian archivists review records of all units that were known to have sent service members to Vietnam during the war. Soviet military units did not deploy to Vietnam in their entirety. Instead, selected individuals or groups were sent to form task forces on the ground. A review of the records from military units is ongoing. The challenges include the human factor – not all of the reports that were created on the ground reached the archives or remained in the archives; many reports contained inaccuracies. Another challenge is classification. As a general rule, records containing operational information may never be declassified and remain inaccessible because of the classification marks by the record originator, the “owner.” Colonel Paderin is only the custodian of such records. Only the originator can review a record for declassification purposes. In accordance with Russian Federation law, a record remains classified for thirty years, at which point it is reviewed by the originator for possible declassification. Upon review, the classification level can be lowered, a record can be declassified and made publicly available, or reclassified. If reclassified, it can be held for an extra ten, twenty or thirty years, or remain classified indefinitely. Some records in the MoD archives are not accessible even to Russian archivists, because the originator of the records controls their classification. As the Chief of Archival Service of the Russian Armed Forces, Colonel Paderin does have access to more than twenty million files stored in the MoD archives. It would not be possible for him personally to search for information of interest to the U.S. Side. Relevant information, once found, is extracted from classified records, declassified, and provided to the U.S. Side with the original classified record cited. Colonel Paderin will review records from the units that sent individual augmentees (IA) to Vietnam. Before dissolution of the USSR in 1991, a number of Soviet units were located in the former Soviet Republics that are now separate countries. When the Soviet Union dissolved, those units remained there, as did their archives. Colonel Paderin will provide a list of those units for the U.S. Side. Mr. McKeague noted that this would be helpful.

Colonel Paderin spoke about the challenges of archival searches among the vast volume of records. He shared his experience responding to numerous requests from Russian citizens to search for their missing family members from WWII onward. He underscored a slow pace and modest results. He stated that this work can take many years, if not decades.

4. New Archival Records Provided by the Russian Side.

Background: During the April 2018 VWWG Technical Talks, the Russian Side stated that a review of more than a hundred Vietnam War-related files in the Central Defense Archives was

completed; no new information was found. The U.S. Side followed up in this 2019 round of discussions to ask about next steps in archival search.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin confirmed that the review of a portion of the records from the Central Defense Archives was completed but research continues in other archival collections. He provided a new set of documents resulting from these searches. The records include reports of 1967-70 aerial battles compiled by Soviet defense specialists who served in Vietnam: air interception and shoot downs of U.S. aircraft, and diagrams of aerial battles. Some of those records provided limited information on U.S. personnel from the downed aircraft, e.g., “the pilot was captured,” “died from wounds,” “rescued by a U.S. helicopter,” but no further details.

5. Archival Search in Russian Navy Archives.

Background: In 2017-18, the U.S. Side requested a search in the Russian Navy Archives for any reports on search and rescue of U.S. personnel during the Vietnam War. Mr. McKeague asked about the status of that request.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin confirmed that the Navy Archives are under his purview; he will conduct searches regarding war ships that were in the waters around the Vietnam War theatre. Mr. McKeague handed over a revised list of U.S. missing in the loss incidents over water and a list of some Soviet reconnaissance ships that are believed to also have been in the war zone.

6. Crash Sites for Which Locations Are Not Known.

Background: The crash locations of 75 U.S. aircraft lost during the Vietnam War are still unknown. The U.S. Side provided a revised data set with detailed information about those loss incidents and requested that a relevant archival search be conducted.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin stated that records that he just now handed over to the U.S. Side may contain relevant information. He underscored that he will conduct searches and provide records found in the defense archives, and that the analysis can only be done by the U. S. Side.

7. Library Holdings of Russian Military Educational Establishments.

Background: The U.S. Side analyzed selected information from the Vietnam War-era Soviet Air Force training manuals. It included descriptions and diagrams of aerial battles that were practically identical to the ones found in the reports of Soviet advisors provided by the Russian Side. The U.S. Side requested that a search be conducted in Russian military schools and universities for similar manuals or other instruction materials.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin stated that at present it is not possible to conduct searches among library holdings. He will first focus on reviewing records from the defense archives.

8. Military Medical Exhibit in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Background: In April 2018, an exhibit on Soviet medical assistance to Vietnam during the war opened in the Military Medical Museum. It includes uniforms and personal items of U.S.

personnel. Based on available information, Soviet medical personnel treated captured U.S. service members in field hospitals and might possess information about U.S. POW/MIAs. Mr. McKeague asked that Colonel Paderin facilitate a visit to the Military Medical Museum to view the exhibit and meet with its director to discuss Vietnam War-related archival holdings and access to Soviet medical personnel.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin stated that after restructuring, the museum is subordinate to the Russian Ministry of Culture and is open to the public. The museum archives, however, remained within the MoD archival system. Medical units might have sent their reports to the Main Military Medical Department. In addition to military medical personnel, there were also civilian medical personnel sent to Vietnam. Colonel Paderin will include military hospitals in his archival search as records of all hospitals are held in the Military Medical Archives.

9. Vietnam War Oral History Program.

Background: Reinstatement of the Vietnam War Oral History Program in Russia was discussed during previous engagements and was raised again by the U.S. Side during Technical Talks-2019.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin stated that the former 10th Main Directorate of the Soviet General Staff maintained lists of names of Soviet officers who took part in the Vietnam War. Challenges to locating and facilitating interviews with these individuals include the following: they signed non-disclosure agreements and, even if they may have since expired, these veterans still might not be willing to be interviewed. Colonel Paderin stated that Russian Federation Federal Law 152 prevents unauthorized personal information disclosure to third parties. He advised that the U.S. Side work directly with the Vietnam War veterans organizations on this issue.

10. Russian Archivist to Work on USRJC U.S. Side's Research Requests.

Background: The U.S. Side discussed hiring a Russian archivist who would satisfy clearance requirements for access to relevant archival records in the Russian restricted archives and would work full-time on U.S. Side's requests by all four working groups. The Russian Side has identified a candidate to perform this work. The U.S. Side asked about the level of access to classified records of the MoD Archives that will be granted to this person. At the time of these 2019 VWWG technical talks, the technical details of how the U.S. Side would utilize the services of this archivist are being discussed separately.

Discussion: Colonel Paderin stated that this archivist would not be granted access to classified records related to the Vietnam War that are held in the MoD Archives. This Russian archivist will have access to unclassified and declassified records only, similar to the U.S. Side's Russian contracted researchers who have been working in the MoD archives with World War II and Korean War records. Colonel Paderin reiterated that only the originators of classified records can allow access to them and, even if this person had the appropriate clearance, he would still not be allowed facility access. Colonel Paderin stated that there are not many unclassified or declassified records in the MoD archives that pertain to the Vietnam War, and that his own archivists will review them.

NOTE: Colonel Paderin's statements regarding the lack of access to restricted records for the proposed Russian archivist are at odds with previous statements made by the Russian Side on this issue. The U.S. Side will seek clarification from the USRJC Russian Chairman and Executive Secretary.

11. Results of VWWG Technical Talks-2019.

Background: A draft document summarizing issues under discussion and way ahead was discussed at the meeting.

Discussion: A draft document entitled "The Results of Technical Talks" will be compiled and coordinated by support staff on both Sides, and then sent to both VWWG Co-Chairmen for review. Colonel Paderin will outline his suggested steps forward. This would help him determine what work in which priority order he would do. At present, his immediate priorities: continue review of records of military units that took part in or sent IAs to the Vietnam War; determine which military units remained, along with their archives, in other former Soviet countries at the time of dissolution of the USSR; locate and review records of military hospitals; search in the Russian Navy Archives for deck logs and reports from the ships that were present in the waters close to the conflict in Vietnam. Colonel Paderin added that his work on USRJC is additional to his main responsibilities as Chief of Archival Services which do not allow for a lot of time to devote to VWWG matters. His archivists work on U.S. issues on a volunteer basis. However, he assured Mr. McKeague that if any information pertaining to U.S. service members is found in any of the Russian MoD archives, it will be handed over to the U.S. Side. He stated that he knows first-hand what information on missing personnel means to their families. Mr. McKeague agreed with this and stated that USRJC's work has always been done despite and outside of political rhetoric.