

VFW Urges Russia to Reopen Archives to POW/MIA Researchers

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. recently returned from a 12-day trip to Europe to urge the Russian government to revitalize the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs, and to meet with American service members stationed in Italy to discuss how VFW can better serve them and their families.

In Moscow, Thomas J. Tradewell Sr. met with members from both houses of the Russian Federation's parliament, as well as the leadership of two prominent veterans' organizations. His message was for them to urge their government back to the Joint Commission.

He said an exchange of diplomatic notes in July was a positive step forward, but Russia has yet to act.

"The diplomatic note was viewed as a sign that they would quickly revive their end of the Joint Commission," said Tradewell, a Vietnam veteran from Sussex, Wis., "but Russia has yet to appoint a new co-chairman, and U.S. researchers are still barred from their central military archives, which hampers research efforts and further diminishes the hopes of American families everywhere.

"The Russian government needs to do what they said they would do," he said.

According to U.S. officials in the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office, Russia's military archives are vitally important to the Full Accounting Mission because documents could help to determine the fate of some of the 88,000 missing and unaccounted-for Americans going back to World War II. Created in 1992, the Joint Commission had been the key to accessing those archives, until a reduction in the size of their government's executive branch removed the Russian co-chairman. The U.S. was told it was an oversight, but the oversight has now kept American researchers out of the archives since October 2006.

Tradewell is the sixth consecutive VFW national commander to journey to Russia on a veteran-to-veteran initiative to help account for missing Americans. This trip followed one he made to the People's Republic of China in September, where permission was obtained for VFW to visit their archives next year. According to news reports published yesterday,

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Chinese military archivists discovered documentation that could help locate 15 airmen who died when their B-29 bomber crashed on Chinese soil on Nov. 5, 1950. Other documents related to missing Americans were also reportedly found that could help determine the fates of some of the 8,100 missing Americans from the Korean War.

"I am proud of the VFW's lead role in helping to account for missing American servicemen," said Tradewell. "Our veteran-to-veteran initiative is bearing fruit because of the worldwide respect professional military men and women have in each other. We know the service and sacrifice that is inherent to our profession, and that mutual understanding helps to convince governments that the Full Accounting Mission is a humanitarian issue that transcends politics."

For more on U.S. full accounting efforts, go to the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office website at <http:http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/>, or the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command website at <http:http://www.jpac.pacom.mil/>.