



IN MY OPINION

By Irene Mandra

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 18, 2018 - U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs (USRJC) Co-Chairman United States Air Force Gen. (Ret.) Robert H. "Doc" Foglesong, and Russian Deputy Co-Chairman, Assistant Deputy Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, Full State Counsellor of the Russian Federation, 2nd class, General-Lieutenant (Ret.) Alexander Valentinovich Kirilin announced the results of the 22nd Plenum of the USRJC held at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. on Nov. 28, 2018.

During the Opening Session, General Kirilin noted that the 22nd Plenum occurred on the 75th anniversary of the Tehran Conference. He paid tribute to President

Roosevelt who, according to Kirilin, saved the conference by proposing to Stalin to have a cup of tea at a critical juncture in the negotiations. Kirilin emphasized that in the 26 years of the joint work of the Commission, the Russians and the Americans have established good working relationships and continue to have regular meetings despite the challenging geopolitical environment. He emphasized that both sides are willing to work hard to find their lost ones. Foglesong echoed the mutual desire to continue to work together in pursuit of the respective noble goals.

Productive meetings took place in the separate Working Group sessions devoted to World War II, the Cold War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Highlights were: exploring ways in which U.S. records might help the Russians account for the large numbers of displaced persons who immigrated to the West after World War II, a possible field investigation of an alleged B-24 bomber crash site on Kamchatka, and an agreement to carry out a Cold War excavation next year in the region of Vladivostok based on forensic results determined by a joint U.S.-Russian investigative team in May 2018. There was a mutual pledge to do everything possible to account for the 264 Soviet servicemen still missing from the Afghan War from 1979 to 1989.

During the separate meetings, discussions were held regarding additional reviews of restricted records related to the Cold, Korean, and Vietnam Wars among the holdings of the Central Archives of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, to include the archives of the Soviet General Staff. Additionally, the sides agreed to continue work to commemorate aviators lost during "Project Zebra," a WWII operation that trained allied Soviet aircrews on American-provided naval patrol aircraft. Also, the digitization of information from captured German documents at the National Archives for incorporation into a Russian data base of the missing continues, the main activity of the Russian Side Office in Washington, D.C. The Plenum fittingly concluded with a reception on, November 29, organized by the Veterans of Foreign Wars in their Washington, D.C. headquarters. In all, the 22nd Plenum provided a venue for mutual updates on the work accomplished throughout the past year and an opportunity to plan for upcoming projects and other joint efforts. Both sides agreed that the 23rd Plenum will be held in Moscow in November 2019 and that meetings for the individual Working Groups would be held throughout the year, with precise dates to be determined.