

THE EDVA VENUE AND THE PETER DEBBINS INDICTMENT

DOJ just rolled out the indictment of a former Special Forces officer for spying for Russia.

The general story is that GRU started recruiting Peter Rafael Dzubinski Debbins when he traveled to Russia via family ties when he was young. He went on to join the Army and then the Special Forces. Along the way, he told GRU about who was in his units and what their mission was. The timeline in the indictment starts in 1996, when Debbins traveled to Chelyabinsk as a student. Debbins met with GRU officers in Russia repeatedly; after he joined the Army he provided details of what his units did, including when he was stationed in Azerbaijan in 2004, where his clearance was suspended and he was discharged from the Army.

After he was discharged, on his trips to Russia in 2008 and 2010, Debbins tried to drum up Russian business. The indictment seems to suggest he started to get cold feet in 2009, resisting the recruitment.

Beginning in April 2009, DEBBINS and [Russian Intelligence Officer] 7 began exchanging a series of emails that, on their face, referenced potential business opportunities. In an April 2009 email, RIS 7 encouraged DEBBINS to travel to Russia for a visit, but DEBBINS did not commit to the trip. Later, in August 2009, RIS sent an email to DEBBINS inviting DEBBINS to travel to Russia and offering to pay his expenses. DEBBINS, however, did not travel at that time.

Subsequent to that seeming moment of resistance, however, Debbins got a new TS/SCI security clearance and traveled to Russia to discuss

business with someone linked to the GRU. He did not, as most recently instructed, bring a Field Manual, because (he said) he feared he'd be caught by DHS.

Nevertheless, his GRU handlers still pitched him on a business deal. On January 3, 2011, after being reminded of his ties to GRU, Debbins moved to DC and started working on the business deal with the Russian.

A January 3 email from Debbins to the business partner is the single thing that (presumably) happened in EDVA, and the single thing that happened in 2011, the last year of the scope of this indictment.

On January 3, 2011, DEBBINS sent the RUSSIAN NATIONAL an email stating that he had moved to "the capital," meaning Washington, D.C., and that he was working on their business matter.

And yet, even though Debbins had closest ties to Minnesota for the span of this indictment (and could have gotten venue in North Carolina through Special Forces for some of the overseas stuff), the venue is EDVA.

That may be because that's the easiest place to win a national security case.

Or it may be because what has happened since 2011, when Debbins has been traveling elite circles and working on cybersecurity, is of more interest to the government. [h/t Laura Rozen for both links] According to one online biography, Debbins was at Fort Meade from around 2012 to 2015 and then worked as a contractor since.

Later, I got a job working at Fort Meade as a Russian analyst and did that for three years. I then transitioned to working as a cyber instructor for CACI for another three years.

Which is to say it's unclear whether this indictment is about what happened between 1996

and 2011 – the span covered by the indictment –
or about what has happened since.