

VFW Overseas Initiative Helps POW/MIA Mission

‘On POW/MIA and other high-interest issues, no one does more for veterans’

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. returned last week from a trip to Europe to meet with Russian officials regarding their renewed support of America's POW/MIA mission, and to meet with U.S. troops stationed in Italy to discuss how VFW can better serve them and their families.

In Moscow, John E. Hamilton met with the leadership of the Committees for Veterans Affairs and Defense in their State Duma, and the Russian Federation Council Committee for Security and Defense. He also met with two of Russia's largest veterans' organizations, the War Veterans Committee and the Combat Brotherhood, and the Russian co-chair of the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs, Dr. Yekaterina Priyezzheva, who in July attended the VFW's 113th National Convention in Nevada.

"Our veteran-to-veteran initiative in Russia is vital to gaining further access to eyewitnesses and documents inside their central military archives," said Hamilton, a triple Purple Heart recipient for wounds received as a Marine rifleman in Vietnam.

"This is because the VFW can open doors no politician or bureaucrat can access because our sole agenda is purely humanitarian with no strings attached," he said. "The Russians understand this, having still about 265 of their own missing in Afghanistan. We want to help determine the fate of possibly thousands of missing Americans dating back to World War II, and return them home to their families. On POW/MIA and other high-interest issues, I am proud to say that no one does more for veterans than the VFW."

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

Accompanied by VFW Washington Officer Executive Director Robert E. Wallace, Hamilton also met with U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul, was briefed on political-military issues by U.S. Defense Attaché Brig. Gen. Peter Zwack, and was able to meet with the Marine Security Guard Detachment and other embassy staff.

In Italy, he received update briefings by U.S. Army Garrison-Vicenza, U.S. Army Africa and the 173rd Airborne Brigade, as well as installation tours of the medical clinic and warrior transition unit, along with lunch with the troops and dinner with local VFW Post 8862. He would also have validated the military's top personnel concerns: threats to their pay and benefits, retirement system, and other Quality of Life programs. Hamilton promised to continue to champion their issues in the White House and in Congress.

The VFW national commander also attended the VFW Eastern Conference meeting in Germany, and placed a VFW wreath at the American Cemetery in Normandy, France, to commemorate the 68th anniversary of the D-Day landing.

This trip followed one he made to the People's Republic of China in May to help U.S. researchers gain further access into China's military archives. He also met and thanked American military and civilians assigned to the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command in Thailand and Vietnam who do the onsite investigations and recoveries in Southeast Asia.

"Overseas trips are vitally necessary because of VFW's international work on the POW/MIA issue, which is unmatched by any other veterans' organization," said Hamilton. "It's also a great opportunity to personally express our entire organization's appreciation to our military and civilian personnel serving around the world, and to thank our overseas VFW comrades for what they do daily to support the troops and their families."

For more on U.S. full accounting efforts, go to the [Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office website](#), or the [Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command website](#).

Photo Caption: Left, VFW National Commander John Hamilton discusses Russian World War II losses with the former Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Army Gen. Alekseevich M. Moiseev, who is now the Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee for Social and Veteran's Affairs. Translating is Slava Sorokin, who works for the Joint Commission Support Directorate at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.