



VFW Visits Chinese Military Archives

Access is what VFW provides the POW/MIA accounting mission

May 29, 2012

After several years of coordination, a senior delegation from the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. was permitted inside the Chinese military archives in Beijing today. The visit is the first time representatives from any nongovernmental organization have entered the People's Liberation Army's Archives.

"It was a unique honor that we hope will further our government's effort to return unaccounted-for American servicemen home to their families," said VFW Senior Vice Commander John E. Hamilton, who was accompanied by VFW Adjutant General Allen F. "Gunner" Kent.

Hamilton is nearing the end of a three-week, fact-finding mission to the Far East. It began May 16 in Hawaii with briefings and tours of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, U.S. Pacific Command and Marine Corps Base Kaneohe Bay, plus visits with VFW Department of Hawaii members. From there they flew to Bangkok for meetings with JPAC's Detachment 1, a courtesy call with U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Kristie Kenney, and visits with VFW Department of the Pacific District 5 members.

In Hanoi, Vietnam, the VFW delegation met with U.S. Ambassador David Shear and JPAC's Detachment 2, before traveling south to Da Nang to personally thank a joint U.S.-Vietnamese recovery team at an MIA loss site outside the city. It was the VFW's 22nd consecutive visit to Vietnam, dating back to 1991, four years prior to the U.S. Embassy being opened.

In Beijing, Hamilton met with the U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission Robert Wang and the U.S. defense attaché, Air Force Brig. Gen. David Stillwell, as well as with officials from the

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Chinese Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense, before touring the archives, which may potentially contain records about the fate of many missing Americans dating back to World War II.

The VFW senior vice commander toured the archives for well over an hour. He was shown where the records are kept, copied and recorded. He was also shown where Chinese personnel were working on cases of missing Americans from previous wars and conflicts at the request of U.S. government agencies, principally the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office.

Hamilton said the archivists were very helpful in answering his questions, plus he was able to tour any part of the facility without restriction. The archivists said they look forward to VFW visiting them next year.

“Access is what the VFW provides to America’s full accounting mission,” said VFW National Commander Richard L. DeNoyer, whose trip to Beijing last year helped lay the final groundwork for this year’s visit.

“Returning our fallen to their loved ones is at its very soul a humanitarian mission, and the VFW can open new doors because we are not politicians or government employees who have to follow a strict protocol,” he said. “What we began with Vietnam in 1991 branched into Russia in 2004 and now China, and we are very grateful that every foreign official along the way has understood and shared our commitment to returning all fallen warriors home to their families.”