

Vietnam Veteran Elected to Lead Nation's Largest Organization of Combat Veterans

John E. Hamilton will lead VFW as Commander-in-Chief

Jul 25, 2012

RENO, Nev. — America's largest organization of combat veterans has elected a Vietnam War veteran to head the 1.5 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

John E. Hamilton, a longtime resident of Jacksonville, Fla., and current resident of St. Augustine, Fla., was elected VFW Commander-in-Chief on July 25, 2012, during the 113th VFW National Convention, held July 21 – July 25, in Reno, Nev.

In [his acceptance speech](#), Hamilton, who served in the Marine Corps from 1968-1970, reminded the mostly Vietnam-era audience that VFW must remain vigilant in its efforts to care for war veterans, especially in these tough economic times as our country's wars wind down.

“What we have accomplished over the past 113 years on Capitol Hill and in cities and towns everywhere is legendary, but our future existence is 100 percent dependent on what we do tomorrow ... the reason our voice needs to be heard is because all wars end ... Iraq last year and Afghanistan by 2014. That means veterans' issues could once again take a back seat to whatever new national priority becomes the flavor of the day,” stated Hamilton.

He went on to note the importance of the bond VFW members share with newly returning veterans, and VFW's responsibility to assist them.

“Comrades, that shared [combat] experience bridges all generational gaps. That's why we must be there ... not just for the handshake and pat on the back ... but to help them find jobs ... to use our own re-adjustment experiences to help them overcome whatever emotional scars they returned home with ... and to help steer them to a service officer and into the VA.

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This is our sacred duty, comrades ... it's a lifetime commitment to pay it forward ... because we were all young once when we went off to war, but much older and wiser when we returned. We must pass that knowledge on."

National Commander Hamilton also discussed his recent trip to Southeast Asia and Vietnam – his first return to the country since being wounded in 1970. Full accounting of America's missing service members is an issue that is extremely important both to Hamilton and the VFW. There are approximately 83,000 missing GIs dating back to WW II and under Hamilton's leadership, VFW will continue to make the trip overseas in an effort to help account for our missing.

Hamilton commented on why VFW leaders will continue this initiative, stating: "The reason is because we can open doors no one else can because we are not politicians or bureaucrats ... we are veterans ... and the VFW is respected around the world for our staunch advocacy of this one humanitarian mission that returns our fallen to their families."

In recognition of his service, Hamilton received the Purple Heart with two Gold Stars, the Combat Action Ribbon, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal with two Bronze Stars, the Republic of Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation Gallantry Cross Color, the Republic of Vietnam Unit Citation Civil Actions Color (First Class) and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.

He joined the VFW in 1974 at Post 7909 in Jacksonville, Fla., where he maintains his Legacy Life (Gold Level) membership. He has served the VFW in many leadership positions, including the National Council of Administration from 1989-1991 and as State Commander from 1987-1988. He served on the board of the VFW National Home from 2002-2008 and as its president from 2004-2005. He also served as Supreme Commander of the Military Order of the Cootie from 1992-1993.

Hamilton graduated with honors from Georgia Military Academy in 1967. He worked as a professional wrestler throughout the United States and the world for 15 years as Johnny Montana, (also known as "Dr. Death") along with other names and identities.

Hamilton was named Florida's Young Veteran of the Year in 1981. He has been honored by Presidents Jimmy Carter and George H. W. Bush for his outstanding community service and leadership.

Hamilton is a member of the Military Order of the Cootie, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Disabled American Veterans, American Legion and the Semper Fidelis Society.

During his year-long term, Hamilton will log thousands of miles within the U.S. and internationally to promote the VFW, veterans' issues and quality of life initiatives for active-duty, Reserve and Guard members.

Also elected were Bill Thien, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, of Georgetown, Ind., and John Stroud, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, of Hawthorne, Nev.