

VFW Recruits in New Mexico's High Desert

The 30th annual Bataan Memorial Death March this spring proved a great opportunity for membership recruiting

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For the ninth year, VFW representatives attended the Bataan Memorial Death March on March 17 at White Sands Missile Range, N.M. The annual march through 26.2 miles of desert terrain is held to remember those who defended the Philippine Islands during World War II. (See p. 36 for an article on the 30th annual march.)

In addition to being an event sponsor and on hand to help out, VFW members signed up nearly 200 new members over a three-day period.

Department of New Mexico Commander Mark Decker said a large VFW booth was set up in the hallway at the Las Cruces Convention Center and that anyone going to register for the march had to walk past the VFW.

"In past years, we have signed up WWII vets," Decker said. "This year, we signed up quite a few Vietnam vets and some from Desert Storm/Shield and Somalia. But the majority were from Iraq and Afghanistan."

Decker, who has attended the march three times, said VFW's presence there is about much more than recruiting. VFW and Auxiliary volunteers try to make people feel welcome and thank each one for coming out.

"It's a wonderful experience," he said. "There is always so much camaraderie."

For five years in a row, Marine Corps retiree Cynthia Archuleta has attended the memorial march and recruited for VFW.

"The best part is that there are people from all over the world who come out for this," said

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Archuleta, New Mexico's junior vice commander and Department service officer. "It's so enjoyable to talk and hear people's stories."

The Iraq vet said she has talked to people who told her after hearing her recruiting pitch, they joined a VFW Post.

Overall, Archuleta said she finds veterans receptive to the idea of joining VFW. Sometimes, she said, a veteran will talk about a bad experience he or she might have had at a VFW Post. So she explains not all Posts are the same.

A VFW canopy is set up with pallets of water to hand out to participants as they cross the finish line.

"We were there to tell people about the assistance and support VFW offers veterans and their families," VFW Membership Director Rick Butler said. "We also had a drawing for the VFW Tribute Henry Rifle. Casey Tasco, a new life member from the Department of New Jersey, was the lucky recipient."

Butler said this opportunity for recruiting is just another example of VFW being present in the community.

VFW Commander-in-Chief B.J. Lawrence said while he's proud of the recruiting efforts put forth during the event, he's most proud of VFW being a march sponsor.

"Being from Alamogordo, N.M., supporting this annual memorial march has been very near and dear to my heart for years," Lawrence said. "The VFW is honored to be a part of an event that honors and preserves the stories and sacrifices of the Bataan Death March soldiers which so powerfully aligns with our mission as an organization."

This article is featured in the 2019 June/July issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Janie Dyhouse](#), senior editor for VFW magazine.