

VFW Still Serving Those Who Serve Around the World

Two VFW teams met with major commands, service members and families stationed in Europe and Asia

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WASHINGTON – During the last week of September, two VFW teams were simultaneously overseas, on different continents, engaging with regional U.S. commands, service members and military families, and delivering the message that they have the VFW's support.

On Sept. 26, VFW National Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt and Executive Director Ryan Gallucci arrived in Belgium for the first stop on their two-country mission which also includes Germany. The purpose of their visit was to learn about the mission, readiness and quality of life of those assigned in Europe. VFW leadership and staff regularly travel overseas solely to engage with service members, veterans and their families, to better and more relevantly advocate on their behalf, serving as their voice to the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Congress and the administration.

“These trips are vitally important to us because supporting our service members, veterans and their families is why the VFW was created to begin with,” said Sarmiento. “I wanted to send a message loud and clear to all who serve overseas – the VFW has not forgotten about you, and we have your backs. No better way to do that than in person.”

The delegation visited NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) and Chièvres Air Base in Brussels before traveling to Wiesbaden, Germany, on Sept. 30. For the remainder of their time in country, they will visit various installations and major commands, to include U.S. Air Force Europe (USAFE,) Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, U.S. European Command Headquarters (EUCOM.)

“We have learned a lot on this trip,” said Gallucci. “The thing that stood out the most is that the Department of Defense's total U.S. workforce in Europe – service members and the

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veterans who support the military as government civilians and contractors – need VA benefits assistance. The VFW can absolutely provide that support and we are going to look for ways to make it a reality.”

Over on the Korean Peninsula, a team from the VFW’s National Veterans Service (NVS) provided critical information to major commands and transitioning service members alike. Beginning Sept. 23, NVS Director Mike Figlioli, NVS Deputy Director Gregg Orto, and NVS Assistant Director and National Pre-Discharge Claims Representative Cindy Noel, paid visits to U.S. Forces Korea and Eighth U.S. Army at Camp Humphreys, as well as Seventh Air Force and the 51st Fighter Wing at Osan Air Base. At each location, they met with the command groups to explore how to provide permanent support to service members preparing to separate or retire from the military. They also presented briefings to service members about the VA claims process and the free benefits claims assistance services that VFW Accredited Representatives provide to all veterans, military retirees and service members transitioning into civilian life.

The team departed the Republic of Korea on Oct. 1 and traveled to Hawaii to provide the same information and services to active-duty military men and women stationed on the islands. Discussions are already underway of a more enduring presence of VFW Accredited Representatives on military installations in Hawaii to support transitioning service members there.

“While they may be a whole ocean away in a different country, those in uniform and their families are close to our hearts and in our thoughts always,” said Lipphardt. “When they see us making the effort to visit them where they are, they know the VFW means what it says and that makes all the difference.”

View photos from the trips on the [VFW Facebook page here](#).