

A Full Accounting of All Missing Troops

For the first time since 2019, VFW delegates visited Southeast Asia in March to observe MIA recovery efforts

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A priority goal since 1929, VFW is committed to the noble mission to account for all missing U.S. veterans from past wars. The VFW's influence in Washington, D.C., made possible the formation in 2015 of today's Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) and its mission to recover U.S. troops listed as POWs and MIAs.

VFW delegates saw first-hand the recovery efforts by DPAA in Southeast Asia during a visit in March. Then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Timothy Borland, then-Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, VFW Washington Office Executive Director Ryan Gallucci and VFW Washington Office Director of Public Affairs Rob Couture met with military and civilian personnel as part of the recovery mission to find missing troops of the Vietnam War. As of May 22, 1,579 troops of the Vietnam War are MIA. (See sidebar on p. 22.)

'HELP EDUCATE OUR ORGANIZATION'

During the VFW delegation's visit in Thailand, Borland, Gallucci and Sarmiento visited the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok. There, VFW's leaders met the U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Robert Godec and spoke with Army Col. Kurtis Leffler, the commanding officer of Joint United States Military Group Thailand, about their relationship with Thailand's military in the region.

"I am so proud to be a part of this very honorable mission back to Southeast Asia," Borland said during the visit. "This is my first visit ever to the region, and in just the day-and-a-half of being in Thailand, I have already gained some valuable knowledge I will take back with me and help educate our organization that every veteran counts, to include those living here."

VFW leadership had been unable to visit DPAA sites in Southeast Asia since 2019 because of COVID restrictions. That hiatus was the first break in visits since 1991, when VFW became

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the first veterans service organization to coordinate recovery site visits to Vietnam.

Sarmiento, who was elected VFW Commander-in-Chief in July, said he was “eager” to visit DPAA’s field sites to meet the military service members and civilians who have made recovering missing Americans a priority.

“For the first time in four years, the VFW is meeting the challenge of seeing first-hand the critical humanitarian work that DPAA does in Southeast Asia,” Sarmiento said.

This article is featured in the 2023 September issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), associate editor for VFW magazine. To see more photos from the trip, visit: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.589583039876611&type=3>.