VFW Thanks Russia for Renewed POW/MIA Support

WORK TO RETURN MISSING AMERICANS UNMATCHED BY ANY VETERANS' ORGANIZATION

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The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. returned this week from a trip to Europe to meet with Russian officials regarding their revitalized support of America's POW/MIA mission, and to meet with U.S. troops stationed in Italy to discuss how VFW can better serve them and their families.

In Moscow, Richard L. DeNoyer met with the leadership of the Committee for Veterans Affairs in the State Duma and the Russian Federation Council Committee for Security and Defense, as well as with Yekaterina Priyezzheva, the new Russian co-chair of the U.S. Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs. Ms. Priyezzheva was appointed in June along with 31 other commissioners after the VFW earlier this year led an effort by seven U.S. veteran and POW/MIA family organizations to write Russian President Dmitry Medvedev to ask him to restore his side of the joint presidential commission, which was created in 1992 by former Presidents George H.W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin.

"Russia's cooperation is vital to gaining access to eyewitnesses and to documents inside their central military archives that could help to determine the fate of possibly thousands of missing Americans dating back to World War II," said DeNoyer, who was the eighth consecutive VFW national commander to journey to Russia on a veteran-to-veteran initiative to help account for missing Americans.

This trip followed one he made to the People's Republic of China in July to help U.S. researchers gain further access into China's military archives, and a February visit to Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to meet and thank American military and civilians assigned to the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, who do the onsite investigations

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and recoveries.

"I am proud of the VFW's lead role in helping to account for our missing servicemen," said DeNoyer, a retired Marine and Vietnam combat veteran from Middleton, Mass. "There is a renewed sense of support in Russia to account not only for missing Americans, but for 270 missing Russians from their war in Afghanistan. I believe the continued involvement of the VFW has played a tremendous role in making this happen, as well as our professional relationships with their veterans' organizations, the Combat Brotherhood and the War Veterans' Committee."

Accompanied by VFW Washington Officer Executive Director Robert E. Wallace, DeNoyer also met with Deputy Chief of Mission Sheila Gwaltney at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, were briefed on political-military issues by the U.S. Defense Attaché, Rear Admiral Douglas Venlet, and were able to meet with the Marine Security Guard Detachment.

In Italy, he received update briefings by U.S. Army Garrison-Vicenza and U.S. Army Africa, as well as installation tours of the medical clinic and warrior transition unit, along with lunch with the troops and dinner with local VFW Post 8862.

Prior to returning to the States, he stopped briefly in France to lay a VFW wreath at the American Cemetery in Normandy to commemorate the 67th anniversary of the D-Day landing.

"Overseas trips are vitally necessary because of VFW's international work on the POW/MIA issue, which is unmatched by any other veterans' organization," said DeNoyer. "Plus it's a great opportunity to personally express our entire organization's appreciation to our military and civilian personnel serving around the world, and to thank our overseas VFW comrades for what they do daily to support the troops and their families."

For more on U.S. full accounting efforts, go to the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office website, or the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command website.