

VFW Delegation Returns to Southeast Asia

This is VFW national leadership's first mission to Thailand, Laos and Vietnam in four years

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BANGKOK — Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Commander-in-Chief Tim Borland and a VFW delegation arrived in Thailand for the first leg of their three-country diplomatic and fact-finding mission to Southeast Asia, the first of its kind since 2019.

“I am so proud to be a part of this very honorable mission back to Southeast Asia,” Borland said. “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.”

During the first 36 hours on the ground, the delegation, which also includes VFW Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief Duane Sarmiento, VFW Executive Director Ryan Gallucci and VFW Washington Office Communications and Public Affairs Director Rob Couture, completed a robust schedule of engagements. On Monday, the delegation met members of the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) Detachment 1 and received a mission briefing about their area of responsibility. They also had a chance to visit members of the Joint United States Military Advisory Group Thailand as well as had an office call with the U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Robert Godec.

“I’m looking forward to learning so much more in the coming days,” Borland said. “I’m so glad we can get back to business, especially after being held back due to the pandemic.”

For almost 30 years, the annual trip to Southeast Asia was intended to prepare VFW leadership for the advocacy work they would do during their year as the organization’s national commander. Then in early 2020, COVID restrictions kept the VFW from traveling abroad. Now with nearly all restrictions lifted, VFW delegates will again be able to observe and learn more about search and recovery operations in person.

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"For the first time in four years, the VFW is meeting the challenge of seeing firsthand the critical humanitarian work that DPAA does in Southeast Asia," said Sarmiento. "We are eager get out to DPAA field sites and to meet with the American service members, civilians, and host nation counterparts who make recovering our missing Americans a priority."

Another opportunity the delegation was able to take advantage of was visiting with members of the VFW Department of Pacific Areas' District 5. During a luncheon on Tuesday, local VFW Post members living in Thailand and Cambodia shared the challenges faced by the veteran community living there.

"It was great to connect with VFW comrades who are on the ground in Thailand and around the region," said Gallucci, who is on his first Southeast Asia trip in his new role as executive director. "They are serving the thousands of veterans who live in this part of the world, many of whom support American interests abroad."

"Whether it's VA disability claims, VA's foreign medical program, or simply access to mail, we are eager to learn about the challenges our veterans face so that we can explore solutions on their behalf when we return stateside," said Gallucci.

In partnership with the Departments of Defense and State, directors of the VFW Washington Office plan and coordinate VFW command visits so the organization can better advocate on behalf of veterans, service members and their families, serving as their voice to Congress, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the DOD.

After their time in Thailand, the delegation will travel to Laos and Vietnam to visit DPAA Detachments 2 and 3, joint field activities and U.S. embassies as well as assigned American service members in each country.

In February, Borland and Gallucci traveled to Poznan, Poland, to visit with U.S. service members supporting the defense of NATO against Russian aggression, and to Italy to visit with American soldiers, airmen, veterans and their families in the Vicenza and Aviano military communities.

Photos of the VFW fact-finding mission to Southeast Asia can be found [here](#). We'll continue to add pictures as they complete their trip.