



## MEMORANDUM

To: National Officers, National Council of Administration, Department Commanders, Department Senior Vice and Junior Vice Commanders, Department Adjutants, and Past Commanders-in-Chief

From: Brian J. Duffy, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief

Date: May 25, 2016

Re: POW/MIA Mission Support Visit to China

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### Background

In a continuation of talks first started in 2008, I had the opportunity to travel to the People's Republic of China late last month to urge more cooperation of America's Full Accounting Mission, as well as to discuss issues and challenges with U.S. Embassy officials. Accompanying me was Bob Wallace, Assistant Adjutant General/Executive Director VFW Washington Office.

### Beijing, China

Shortly after arrival in Beijing we were hosted to dinner by Mr. Zhou Xinzhen, Deputy Secretary-General, and Mr. Wang Xiaowei, Director of the China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC), a nongovernmental organization that is closely connected to the Chinese government.

The dinner was very cordial and the main discussion topic was the POW/MIA issue, the VFW's involvement in same, and the work we do as an organization for veterans, service members and their families. We emphasized the importance of the MIA issue with our members and the American public. We informed them of our ongoing visits to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and to Russia, as well as meetings with veterans and political and government officials in those countries. Messrs. Zhou and Wang pledged to continue to support the VFW in our work with the Chinese government.

The next day we spent in meetings with key staff at the U.S. Embassy and Chinese Ministry of Defense.

We first met with Navy Rear Adm. Adrian Jansen, the U.S. Defense Attaché to China, to discuss the purpose of our visit and the MIA issue in great detail. We learned the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had just cancelled a long-planned excavation operation due to security concerns for the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency recovery team. It appears the recovery site is located near the North Korean border, where there have been tensions in the past. This would be the first of many mentions about North Korea during our trip.

Other issues discussed was the South China Sea issue, in which China claims all of it, despite several other nations also claiming territorial rights. Militarily, the Chinese military is capable and has modern equipment, but has not been battle tested since Vietnam. The mandate of the Peoples Liberation Army is to ensure the viability of the Communist Party and to maintain the stability of the country. Communications are tightly controlled in the country and the government takes the position that Tiananmen Square never happened; in fact, the uprising isn't taught in their schools, as we later learned from a recent college graduate.

We next met with Deputy Chief of Mission David Rank. We discussed the MIA issue and the U.S. relationship with China. A number of American companies manufacture in China, such as Buick. The Chinese watch our politics and the ongoing presidential election very closely. The Chinese understand the MIA issue is humanitarian, and their support of same creates good public relations; however, the issue is still not a priority for them, as validated by the limited access U.S. researchers have to their military archives.

After a working lunch with Marine Corps Lt. Col. Brad Hitchcock, we headed over to the Chinese Ministry of Defense to meet Admiral Li Ji and four others.

After greetings and discussing the importance of the MIA issue to the entire VFW organization, we again asked for more U.S. access to their military archives, which repeats what previous VFW leaders had requested in recent years. The admiral said he has four staff working in the archives along with U.S. personnel, and offered to let us visit the archives on the VFW's next trip to Beijing, which we accepted. Allowing the VFW to visit their archives is positive. The admiral also stated that all soldiers deserve respect, as do their families and the missing. I was pleased to hear him say the Full Accounting Mission is not a political issue but a humanitarian one.

When we asked about the cancelled recovery operation near the North Korean border, he said it will be rescheduled, but added that what North Korea continues to do is very dangerous to regional stability. We said it was our hope that North Korea would one day view the MIA mission as a humanitarian issue.

We felt that the meeting was very positive and that future visits were warranted. We were unable to meet with Chinese veterans' representatives, but hope future VFW delegations will be

able to engage them as allies in the Full Accounting Mission, just as we have with Russian veterans.

After the meeting we returned to the U.S. Embassy to participate in a social with the Marine Security Guard. I had the opportunity to thank them for their continued service, as well as explain what it is the VFW does for them, their fellow service members, veterans, and their families. I also explained the many support programs we have to offer.

### **Conclusion**

Future VFW delegations to China must ensure meetings with veterans, as well as with the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs, too. China has a vast amount of information in their archives, but a major hurdle is the government doesn't quite know what it is they have. As a nongovernmental veterans' organization, the VFW must continue to push China to be more receptive to U.S. efforts to help determine the fate of missing and unaccounted for American service members from World War II-forward.

Only through these visits can we expand overseas relationships as a voice of American veterans — as a voice of their families — to continue to urge deeper access into foreign military archives.

### **Acknowledgements**

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