

Navy Veteran Elected to Lead the VFW

Jul 25, 2013

Members of the nation's largest organization of combat veterans have elected U.S. Navy and Vietnam veteran, William A. "Bill" Thien to lead the 1.6 million member organization.

William A. "Bill" Thien, a resident of Georgetown, Ind., was elected VFW National Commander on July 24, 2013, in Louisville, Ky., during the 114th VFW National Convention.

Thien served in the U.S. Navy from 1969-1974 and served five years in the Indiana National Guard. His decorations include the Vietnam Service Medal with 3 stars, Vietnam Campaign Medal with 1960 Bar, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal (Korea), National Defense Service Medal and several from the National Guard.

During his acceptance speech, he praised the hard work of VFW members and encouraged them not to be overly modest in spreading the word about the organization's accomplishments.

"We have far too many military people and veterans who believe that it's the Pentagon or the President or the Congress who are responsible for their military and disability pay increases or other Quality of Life improvements. We have to tell our story. You tell them that every new program, pay or benefit that they now enjoy is due to the lobbying we do to create them.

"What makes the Veterans of Foreign Wars great is the quality of our people who unselfishly dare to make a personal difference in the lives of fellow comrades, communities and nation. Caring for others, comrades, is what makes the VFW so great ... and I hope you continue to spread the word to everyone," he explained.

He also discussed the recent, successful expansion of the VFW's National Veterans Service program, noting that the VFW now has service officers available at more than 18 of the military's largest installations and regions who stand ready to directly assist transitioning service members in filing VA claims. The program further expanded through the Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment and Student Veterans of America.

"The VFW Washington Office also trains and oversees our nationwide network of more than

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1,200 VA-accredited service representatives, who last year helped 125,000 veterans to recoup an organizational record of \$3.7 billion in compensation and pension from the federal government,” he explained. “Plus our win rate at the Board of Veterans Appeals that is the highest among all major VSOs, and exceeds lawyer-assisted appeals.”

Thien, who joined the VFW more than 40 years ago posed an important question to the VFW membership, asking them how the VFW can change in order to better accommodate a new generation of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. “Comrades, Vietnam veterans have a tight hold on the operation of this organization at every level. If we don’t loosen our grip and give the younger folks free rein, we are going to choke off their participation ... and we all know where that ship is headed,” he noted.

Thien joined the VFW in 1971 at Post 3281 in New Albany, Ind., where he maintains his Gold Legacy Life Membership. He has served the VFW in many leadership positions including All American Post Commander, All State District Commander and All American State Commander. He has also held positions on numerous National committees, including Vice Chairman of Citizenship Education and Community Service and as Chairman of National Scholarship and Recognition.

He attended Indiana University Southeast. He worked as a Team Leader/Shift Supervisor at Duke Energy and is now retired.

He is a member of the American Legion, Veterans of Vietnam War Post 1, National Rifle Association, Patriot Guard Riders, Military Order of the Cootie Pup Tent 51 and VFW National Home.

During his year-long term, Thien will log thousands of miles within the U.S. and internationally to promote the VFW, veterans’ issues and quality of life initiatives for active-duty, Reserve and Guard members.

Also elected were John Stroud, Senior Vice Commander-in-Chief, of Hawthorne, Nev., and John Biedrzycki, Junior Vice Commander-in-Chief, of Coraopolis, Pa.

Watch Bill Thien’s installation into office.