



National POW/MIA Recognition Day

(Greetings)

Thank you for joining us on National POW/MIA Recognition Day. I am honored to be here today to help you salute the men and women who have served and sacrificed to keep America free ... and to salute the families of the missing who continue to keep the candle of hope alive. Today there are more than 81,000 Americans listed as missing and unaccounted-for from our nation's wars going back to the beginning of World War Two.

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That's 81,000 military and civilian men and women ... mothers and fathers ... brothers and sisters ... and sons and daughters.

World War Two officially ended 78 years ago this month, a war that — for America — lasted less than four years, but one that claimed more than 400,000 American lives, saw more than 130,000 Americans taken as prisoners of war, and one that continues to list more than 72,000 Americans as missing in action.

Five years later, America again found itself at war — in Korea — and in three bloody years, more than 35,000 Americans died in-theater, more than 7,100 were taken captive, and today nearly 7,500 continue to be listed as missing in action.

Then came Vietnam, a war that resulted in more than 58,000 American deaths in-theater, almost 600 POWs, and more than 2,500 missing and unaccounted-for Americans ... a number that has now been reduced to around 1,500 because of the tremendous search and recovery efforts of the U.S. government, especially the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, or DPAA.

As we pause to remember their sacrifices, we must also remember the sacrifices that the families of the missing continue to give.

It is true that the costs of war extend far beyond the last shots being fired, and for MIA families, the passage of time does not heal their wounds. For them, the days became

weeks, the weeks became months, then years, and now, sadly, decades.

I cannot imagine the daily loss I would feel if my mother or father had gone to war and didn't return. I cannot imagine reliving the moment the government couldn't tell me if my brother or sister was alive or dead. And I cannot imagine my emotions if that missing person was my son or my daughter.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is what MIA families live with day in and day out. They want answers to questions where there may be none.

They are not asking unreasonable questions, nor do the families have different agendas. All they want to know is

what happened to a loved one our nation sent to war. That is not too much for them to ask, and that is not too much for our government to answer.

Today, this nation reaffirms its resolve to achieve the fullest possible accounting of those who are missing. As veterans and family members of veterans, we, too, must do our part to remember their service and their sacrifice.

I encourage you to seek out the former POWs and the families of the missing in your communities and ask them to publicly tell their stories so that our children and their children will understand the service and sacrifice that's required when America calls upon its military.

Teach them about World War Two ... about a time when a nation of 133 million citizens put 16 million into uniform to help save the world from tyranny.

Teach them about Korea — the forgotten war — but one just as brutal as any conflict in our nation's history.

Teach them about Vietnam ... about how a nation turned its back on an entire generation of soldiers because the public couldn't separate the politics of war from the warrior fighting it.

Teach them about Operation Desert Storm — the first Gulf War — when America vowed to never again turn its back on its warriors ... when America regained its pride and appreciation for those who wear the uniform of our country.

And teach them about our recent wars against terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq — and where you were 22 years ago when terrorists dared to strike our great country.

People who put others before themselves is the story of America ... an America that rose to greatness on the shoulders of ordinary citizens who refused to shirk the responsibility of citizenship ... some of whom paid the highest price to preserve peace and freedom for others to enjoy.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention those involved in the government's full accounting mission ... the records analysts, the DNA scientists and equipment specialists ... and most important, the 500 military and defense

department civilians working at the DPAA's labs around the world.

DPAA carries on a proud tradition first established in 1973 to keep the military's promise to never leave a buddy behind on the battlefield.

From of the glaciers of Tibet and mountains of North Korea ... to the jungles of Southeast Asia and the deserts of Southwest Asia ... DPAA operates under extremely arduous conditions in some of the most austere and hazardous locations on earth.

The unit has suffered personal loss while conducting their operations, but their mission continues unabated, and

that's to obtain the fullest possible accounting of our nation's 81,000 missing Americans.

This year VFW leaders returned to Southeast Asia for the first time since the pandemic to continue our longtime tradition started in 1991 — to meet with foreign government officials and military veterans to discuss and stress the humanitarian aspect of the full accounting mission.

We know the mission is difficult, but we also know how important the mission is for our nation and to the families — and that's why the VFW continues to advocate for their work and has so much appreciation and gratitude for the military and civilian members of DPAA.

It's also why the VFW is working hard in Washington, D.C., to ensure the Defense Department does not reduce DPAA funding which could have devastating impacts on the work and closure they bring to our MIA families.

Yes, our nation is going through some tough fiscal times, but the full accounting mission fulfills a soldier's promise. It is a mission worth protecting.

In closing, let us recommit ourselves to remaining strong in our devotion to the principles for which so many courageously fought and sacrificed. Let us remember those who put country before self and did not return home to their families. Let us remember the families of the missing who continue to burn the candle of hope.

And let us continue to tell America the story that without the service and sacrifice of American servicemen and women, there would not have been a United States of America.

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