

**NATIONAL POW/MIA
RECOGNITION DAY**

**18 SEPTEMBER 2009
WRIGHT-PATTERSON AFB, OHIO**

THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, ON MEMORIAL DAY, ARMED FORCES DAY, VETERANS DAY, ARMISTICE DAY AND POW/MIA DAY, AMERICA HONORS THE SERVICE OF MEN AND WOMEN UNDER ARMS AT WAR AND AT PEACE.

TODAY IS A TIME OF SPECIAL REMEMBRANCE. IT IS A TIME TO REMEMBER THE FACES OF THE PRISONERS OF WAR, AND THOSE LISTED AS MISSING IN ACTION.

OUR PERSONAL REASONS FOR TAKING TIME TO BE HERE WHEN SO MUCH ELSE IS GOING IN OUR WORLD ARE MANY, BUT MOST HONORABLE AMONG THEM IS TO KEEP ALIVE THE AWARENESS OF WAR AND ITS REALITIES WILL NEVER BE OVER FOR THE FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS WHO LOST A GRAND DAD, FATHER, OR HUSBAND - REMEMBERED ONLY FROM PICTURES.

IT'S NOT OVER FOR THOSE WHO SERVED HONORABLY IN A PRISONER OF WAR CAMP OR FOR ANY VETERAN WHO'S MISSING LIMBS, OR VIVID DREAMS WON'T LET THEM FORGET FOR EVEN A DAY. AND CERTAINLY WE ARE HERE AS A SIGN OF OUR KEEPING FAITH WITH THOSE SOULS STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR AND NUMBERED AS POW'S AND MIA'S.

AT THE SAME TIME, TODAY IS A TIME TO REMEMBER THE SERVICE OF ALL FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR. THEY HAVE ENDURED ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES ANYONE---ESPECIALLY AN AMERICAN---CAN FACE, THE LOSS OF PERSONAL LIBERTY.

THE WORLD TODAY IS A CONSTANTLY CHANGING STAGE AS EMERGING NATIONS STRUGGLE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION, RECOGNITION, AND DEMOCRATIC FREEDOMS. WHILE THE UNITED STATES CANNOT SOLVE ALL THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS, AMERICANS ARE ASKED AND PREPARED TO DEFEND OUR NATION'S FUNDAMENTAL INTERESTS WHEN THEY ARE THREATENED. WE ARE PREPARED TO GO BEYOND OUR SHORES TO HELP OTHERS ACHIEVE THOSE PERSONAL LIBERTIES WE CHERISH, YET TOO OFTEN ASSUME SO CASUALLY. WE ROUTINELY PUT OUR MILITARY IN HARM'S WAY TO DEFEND THOSE RIGHTS AND INTERESTS AROUND THE WORLD.

TODAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 2009, IS THE 2,396TH DAY OF CONTINUOUS COMBAT FOR OUR NATION. THIS WAR HAS GONE 3 YEARS AND 2 MONTHS LONGER THAN THE WAR TO END ALL WARS. WORLD WAR TWO ONLY LASTED 1,346 DAYS.

FOR THOSE OF US FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE PART OF “OPERATION HOMECOMING” IN 1973, THE YELLOW RIBBONS AND TONY ORLANDO’S SONG RECREATES AN EXPERIENCE BEYOND SIMPLE WORDS. HOW THE HEARTS OF SOME MUST ACHE, RECALLING THEIR PERSONAL LONELINESS IN CONTRAST WITH THE RETURNEES JOYOUS REUNIONS. AND HOW MUCH LONGER HAVE THE FAMILIES OF WORLD WAR II AND THE KOREAN WAR SUFFERED?

IN THE 1940’S WE STOOD READY AGAINST THOSE WHO WANTED TO DOMINATE THE WORLD. IN THE 1990s WE STOOD AGAINST THOSE WHO WANTED TO DOMINATE OTHER NATIONS AND ETHNIC REGIONS AS WE SAW IN KOSOVO.

TODAY, AMERICAN FORCES ARE A VITAL LINK IN BRINGING STABILITY, PEACE AND DEMOCRACY TO THE PEOPLE IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ.

UNFORTUNATELY, AS IN ALL HOSTILE SITUATIONS, THE RISKS ARE GREAT. LIVES ARE LOST. SOME HAVE ENDURED HARDSHIPS OF BEING A POW. AND WHEN THE GUNS ARE FINALLY SILENT, SOME PERSONNEL REMAIN MISSING IN ACTION.

***WORLD WAR II: 78,750 STILL LISTED AS MIA
KOREA: STILL 8,200 MIA’S
VIET NAM: 2,300 MIA’S***

ON TOP OF THOSE COLD NUMBERS ADD THE KILLED IN ACTION:

***WORLD WAR II: 291,557
KOREA 33,686
VIET NAM 57,410***

TO PARAPHRASE SOME OLD TV COMMERCIALS, LIFE IS FUN AND EASY WHEN YOUR BIGGEST WORRY IS NOT HAVING RING AROUND THE COLLAR, WHEN YOU WEAR NOTHING EXCEPT ENGLISH LEATHER, WHEN YOU CAN TAKE IT ALL OFF WITH NOXEMA, WHEN YOU GET COUPONS AND DISCOUNTS, REBATES AND MONEY BACK GUARANTEES FOR EVERYTHING YOU BUY. LIFE IS FUN WHEN YOU CAN DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE SIMPLY BY CHEWING THE RIGHT GUM, GET RELIEF FROM BACKACHES WITH A LEGAL, SMALL WHITE PILL AND FEEL WONDERFUL BECAUSE YOU ARE PART OF THE PEPSI GENERATION.

AND YOU GOT IT ALL THE OLD FASHIONED WAY...YOU INHERITED IT BECAUSE YOU ARE LUCKY ENOUGH AND BLESSED TO HAVE BEEN BORN IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

BUT SOMETIMES ALL THAT GETS TAKEN AWAY IN AN INSTANT, TAKEN BY THE FICKLE FINGER OF FATE THAT TURNS AN UNFORTUNATE AIRMAN, SOLDIER, SAILOR, MARINE...OR IN TODAY'S WORLD, EVEN A CIVILIAN, INTO A COMBAT CASUALTY...SEEMINGLY A MERE STATISTIC. EVENTS IN OUR WORLD PROVE DAILY WE SHOULD ALL HAVE A GREATER APPRECIATION FOR THIS GOOD LIFE. BUT IT DOESN'T ALWAYS COME EASILY AND IT ISN'T PERMANENT OR SOME GOD GIVEN BIRTH RIGHT. BEYOND DEFENSE BUDGET FIGURES, THERE IS A COST EXTRACTED FROM PEOPLE...PEOPLE WHOSE DEDICATION AND DISCIPLINE PUT THEM UNIQUELY IN HARMS WAY. THE POW/MIA ISSUE GAINED THE FOREFRONT OF PUBLIC AWARENESS DURING THE VIETNAM WAR. THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO FOUGHT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA DID NOT DETERMINE THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY CONDITIONS THERE. YET MILLIONS OF AMERICANS SERVED WITH HONOR AND DISTINCTION IN SUPPORT OF OUR NATION'S FOREIGN POLICY.

MORE THAN THREE DECADES HAVE PASSED SINCE THE END OF THE CONFLICT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA—VIETNAM, LAOS AND CAMBODIA. WE REJOICED INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A NATION AS 591 POW'S STEPPED ON AMERICAN SOIL DURING "OPERATION HOMECOMING" IN 1973. AMERICA WAS ALARMED AND DISMAYED TO FINALLY LEARN THE STORIES OF TORTURE AND DEPRIVATION ENDURED IN THE PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS IN NORTH VIETNAM.

AND THE NATION ASKED, AS IT DOES AFTER EVERY CONFLICT...WHERE ARE THE OTHERS? JUST RECENTLY WE LEARNED THE FATE OF LCDR SPEICHER IN IRAN AFTER MORE THAN 10 YEARS OF SEARCHING.

TODAY WE REMAIN UNITED AND VOW IN OUR HEARTS WE WILL NEVER FORGET OUR SPECIAL COMRADES, THE MISSING IN ACTION.

AS WE STAND HERE, WE HAVE UNACCOUNTED FOR MILIATRY AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL IN THE WAR ZONE OF IRAQ. WE HAVE HAD MILITARY PERSONNEL WHO WERE POW'S IN THIS THEATER AND FORTUNATELY, HAVE BEEN RETURNED. BUT WHETHER FOR YEARS AS WE DID IN VIETNAM OR FOR A MATTER OF WEEKS, IT MATTERS NOT HOW LONG. BEING A POW IS SIMPLY NOT A "VOLUNTEER" DUTY.

I DON'T WANT YOU TO WALK AWAY FROM HERE TODAY FOCUSING ON NUMBERS. I WOULD RATHER YOU REMEMBER THOSE NUMBERS ARE FATHERS, HUSBANDS, BROTHERS AND SONS. WE RECOGNIZE THEIR SACRIFICES. SEVERAL PEOPLE ARE WEARING THE AIRMAN BATTLE DRESS UNIFORM TODAY, NOT TO BE CAMOUFLAGED TO SOME SPECIFIC THREAT HERE IN OHIO, BUT AS A BRIDGE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE WARFIGHTERS WE SUPPORT. WE ALSO RECOGNIZE THE SACRIFICE OF POW/MIA FAMILIES AT HOME. WE OWE A DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO THEM FOR THEIR DEDICATION AND PRIDE IN THE SERVICE OF THOSE WHO SERVED IN PRISON CAMPS, WERE KILLED IN ACTION, OR, FOR SOME, TODAY REMAIN UNACCOUNTED FOR. I ASSURE YOU, THE REPATRIATED MEN WHO FLEW HOME IN THE HANOI TAXI HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN THOSE WHO SERVED IN ANY ARMED CONFLICT.

WE HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN THE HARSH REALITIES OF WAR. TODAY IS TRIBUTE TO ALL AMERICANS WHO SERVE IN UNIFORM AND STAND READY TO GO ANYWHERE, ANYTIME, TO DO ANY JOB ASKED OF THEM. SO ANOTHER REASON TO GATHER TODAY IS TO RENEW OUR NATIONAL SPIRIT...THAT WE ARE PROUD OF THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED THIS NATION AND WE STILL SUPPORT THOSE WHO STAND READY NOW TO SHOULDER THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DEFENDING THIS NATION'S INTERESTS....WHETHER ON SOME FOREIGN SOIL OR IN THE HEARTLAND OF AMERICA ITSELF.

HAVING THE BEST AIRPLANE, BIGGEST SHIP OR MOST POWERFUL TANK IN THE WORLD IS MADE MORE SIGNIFICANT WHEN IT IS OPERATED BY THE BEST MAN OR WOMAN IN UNIFORM IN THE WORLD. THINGS DON'T WORK...PEOPLE DO.

WAR HAS MANY FACETS FROM COMMERCIAL AIRLINERS TURNED INTO FLYING BOMBS, TO PRECISION GUIDED MUNITIONS CAPABLE OF HITTING THE VENTILATION SHAFT OF AN ENEMY HEADQUARTERS. TECHNOLOGY ALLOWS US TO TRAVEL INTO AND FROM SPACE ALMOST ROUTINELY. BEHIND ALL THIS TECHNO-WONDER IS THE BASIC RESOURCE...PEOPLE. IN OUR PROFESSION OF ARMS IT'S THE FLESH AND BLOOD OF PEOPLE WHO CREATE TECHNOLOGY AND MAKE THOSE SYSTEMS WORK.

WAR IS HELL. ITS UGLY, IT'S SCARY AND IT CAN HURT. IT HURTS NOT ONLY THE PLAYERS ON THE FIELD, BUT THE WHOLE TEAM—THE FAMILIES WHO ENDURE THE FEAR, THE LONELINESS AND UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE SAFETY OF LOVED ONES. LONG AND MORE FREQUENT DEPLOYMENTS LIE AHEAD AS WE EXECUTE THIS WAR AGAINST WORLD-WIDE ACTS OF TERRORISM.

TODAY THERE ARE OVER 200,000 SOLDIERS, SAILORS, AIRMEN AND MARINES DEPLOYED AROUND THE WORLD IN AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ, AND SLOVENIA; CONDUCTING COUNTER DRUG OPERATIONS IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA; PATROLLING THE ADRIATIC AND MEDITERANEAN SEA AS WELL AS THE ATLANTIC AND PACIFIC OCEANS AND THE PERSIAN GULF. WE ARE STILL IN KUWAIT, HAITI, BOSNIA, AND CROATIA, JAPAN, GERMANY AND KOREA. THIS WORLD IS NOT AN IDYLIC PLAYGROUND WITH NO BULLIES OR TYRANTS OR JUST CAUSES. INDEED EIGHT YEARS AGO WE WERE ATTACKED IN OUR OWN LAND WHERE THE TARGET WAS INNOCENT CIVILIANS.

AS WE THE FORTUNATE, PERHAPS EVEN SIMPLY “LUCKY,” CELEBRATE 36 YEARS SINCE OUR REPATRIATION, WE CERTAINLY HAVE GROWN OLDER, WISER AND MORE APPRECIATIVE OF WHAT AMERICA - AND BEING AMERICAN - IS ALL ABOUT.

LOOK AT THE AMERICAN FLAG, AN EMBLEM, A SYMBOL OF OUR NATION. THAT FLAG WAS BORN OF, AND PRESERVED BY THE WORK AND SACRIFICES OF PEOPLE. CONSIDER THESE WORDS FROM OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM:

***OH THUS BE IT EVER WHEN FREE MEN SHALL STAND
BETWEEN THEIR LOVED HOMES AND THE WARS DESOLATION
BLEST WITH VICTORY AND PEACE MAY THE HEAVEN RESCUED LAND
PRAISE THE POWER THAT HATH MADE AND PRESERVED US A NATION.
THEN CONQUER WE MUST, WHEN OUR CAUSE IT IS JUST,
AND THIS BE OUR MOTTO: “IN GOD IS OUR TRUST.”
AND THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER IN TRIUMPH SHALL WAVE,
O’ER THE LAND OF THE FREE, AND THE HOME OF THE BRAVE.***

TODAY WE JOIN TOGETHER TO REMEMBER AND HONOR AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO GOD CHOSE NOT TO PERMIT THE JOY OF HOMECOMING. WE WERE THE LUCKY ONES, THE MEN WHO SURVIVED THE EXPERIENCE AND HAVE THE OBLIGATION TO REMEMBER THOSE WHO DIDN’T. AS WE LOOK AT THE POW/MIA FLAG, LIFT YOUR HAND IN SALUTE WITH THE PROMISE TO THOSE LESS FORTUNATE AND THEIR FAMILIES, “YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN.”

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18 Sept 2009**