

Remarks by Senator Max Cleland  
POW/MIA Recognition Day Ceremony at  
Arlington (Va.) National Cemetery  
September 17, 1999

Thank you very much Mr. Secretary, General Shelton, distinguished members of the armed forces, ladies and gentlemen, and especially the families of POWs and missing in action personnel.

What a special pleasure it is to be with you today. I'm honored to be alive. I'm honored to have made it back from war. I consider myself one of the lucky ones.

I have been at this hallowed place a number of times on official ceremonies like this and privately to contemplate the service and sacrifice of those who have given their all for this country. I want you to know that I can't imagine serving in Vietnam (inaudible).. I can't imagine what it was like to be a POW there. I can't imagine what it was like to be a POW in any of our nation's wars.

I especially have a place in my heart for those families (inaudible) . especially the Vietnam War.. Lost a loved one in Vietnam and have no full accounting of what happened. . There never seems to be (inaudible) . a resolution.

Those families are here today and scattered throughout our nation, lost loved ones in Vietnam, have no full accounting of what happened. Or a (inaudible) . return dead or alive. (inaudible . that is the greatest tragedy of the Vietnam War.

I was out at the Central Identification Laboratory in Honolulu last year attempting to see what our nation was doing to identify those missing in action. I think we're doing all we can, but it's never enough. Wars are not over for those who suffer like that. And this day is a special day for them.

I was in Belgium, not long ago, and on the battlefield at Waterloo. After the battle, one of Wellington's troops wrote a friend and basically put it like this: "In times of war and not before, God and soldier men adore. But in times of peace with all things righted, God is forgotten and the soldier slighted."

I think for those of us who were soldiers, that's our one fear: that somehow we'll be forgotten. But let it be known far and wide, around this great nation and around this great world that this nation does not forget. Does not forget its disabled veterans. Does not forget its POWs, and, for certain, does not forget its MIAs and families they represent.

And with the dedication of this inscription on this tomb, it is a special moment for me to be here and, in many ways, celebrate survival. Celebrate life itself. And celebrate this country (inaudible) . they gave the last measure of devotion. And for what? For what? Why did many of us serve. Lincoln said it best (inaudible) . government of the people, by the people and for the people.

I'd like to share with you a little prayer a (former) POW gave me while I was struggling with readjustment back in my home state of Georgia.

Col. Quigley Collins just had gotten out of prison in Hanoi. He spent seven years there and came back to my state and shared a little prayer. He calls it "Soldier's Prayer," and it goes like this:

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve; I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.

I asked God for health, that I might do greater things; I was given infirmity that I might do better things.

I asked for riches, that I might be happy; I was given poverty, that I might be wise.

I asked God for power, that I might have the praise of men; I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life; I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.

I got nothing that I asked for-but everything that I hoped for. Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered. I am among all men, most richly blessed.

