

DoD Holds Seventh Annual POW/MIA Prayer Breakfast

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

ARLINGTON, Va., Feb. 2, 2001 -- The Department of Defense held its seventh annual National Day of Prayer breakfast here on Feb. 1, to remind the nation and DoD personnel of the extraordinary sacrifices made by military men and women.

Robert Jones, deputy assistant secretary of defense for POW and Missing Personnel Affairs, said the annual prayer breakfast is "an opportunity for us to refocus and revitalize our energies to ensure that we're totally committed to the recovery and return to their loved ones."

The guest speaker was former POW retired Air Force Lt. Col. Norman Duquette of Cedar Falls, Iowa. He quipped that coming to the Washington metropolitan areas to deliver a speech "gave me an opportunity to remove my bib overalls and don a white shirt and tie."

Duquette said he accepted the speaking engagement with three objectives in mind: "To join you in prayer for our missing Americans; To thank the Defense Prisoner of War and Missing Personnel Office for their diligent efforts to date in locating our missing countrymen; and To encourage you to continue in a concerted effort until all are returned home, or accounted for."

Duquette said his third objective was to share his story with the audience so they would "better understand a very important combination of six letters of the alphabet -- POW-MIA."

Shot down and captured in North Korea on Jan. 26, 1952, he was listed as missing in action until his release 587 days later.

"When I was shot down, I weighted 170 pounds," Duquette said. "I weighed in at 110 after six weeks of having been 'fattened up' by the Chinese just prior to being released. Somewhere in this 230-pounds which you now see, is a former 90-pound prisoner of war."

He said DPMO has been tasked with an awesome responsibility, to find and return home, America's missing in action and POWs. "This is a task and responsibility, perhaps without end. But, it must be pursued nonetheless -- and relentlessly," Duquette noted.

"By doing so, it demonstrates our resolve to those who serve today in our military, their country will never forsake them in a foreign land, in foreign soil."

Army Chaplain (Capt.) Gregory Tyree of the Chief of Chaplains Office gave the invocation, prayers for the nation and the missing and the benediction.

Congress established the first Thursday of February as the National Day of Prayer, Army Sgt. 1st Class Joya Colucci Gooden told the audience. The day of prayer is an effort "to join together people of all faiths to pray for our nation, our leaders and our spiritual directions," said Gooden of the Joint Commission Support Directorate for the U.S. Russia Joint Commission on POW and Missing Personnel

"This occasion is an opportunity to honor individuals uniquely qualified to speak about faith in challenging situations," Gooden said. "The story of American POWs and missing personnel serves as a strong reminder of their importance to freedom."

The audience included Anthony Principi, the new secretary of Veterans Affairs; and Alan Liotta, deputy POW/Missing Personnel Affairs.

Other attendees included four former POWs and family members of those who remain missing from World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War and the Cold War. Also attending were representatives of major veteran's service organizations, including the Veterans of Foreign War, Disabled American Veterans, American Legion, AMVETS, Vietnam Veterans of America, Korean War Veterans Association, Vietnam/Gulf War Veterans Association and the Women's Army Corps Veterans Association.

Representatives of America's family advocate organizations also attended, including the National League of Family of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, the Coalition of Families of Korean and Cold War POW/MIAs, American Gold Star Mothers, American Gold Star Wives, the National Alliance of Families of American Missing and the Korea/Cold War Family Association of the Missing.