

Memorial Service for American and Vietnamese Servicemen

Remarks by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Fort Myer Memorial Chapel, Fort Myere, VA, Wednesday, April 25, 2001.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz will deliver remarks at a memorial service honoring seven U.S. servicemen and their nine Vietnamese colleagues who were killed April 7, 2001, when their helicopter crashed in Vietnam during a site survey for an upcoming mission to recover the remains of U.S. servicemen lost during the Vietnam War. The memorial service is on Wednesday, April 25, at 9 a.m. EDT at the Memorial Chapel on Fort Myer. Media wishing to cover this event should contact Patty Heard at (202) 685-2852.

Mr. Ambassador [Vang Rattanavong of Laos]; Minister Counselor Que [Pham Van Que, Deputy Chief of Mission of Vietnam]; Mr. Tan Vunyaung [Political Counselor, Embassy of Cambodia]; Senator [Bob] Smith, thank you, and thank everyone for being here; thank you for your strong support of our joint efforts to account for missing Americans; the families of Americans still missing; the men and women who labor to bring them home, and those who called these men colleagues and friends--the members of our Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office, the Army Central Identification Laboratory, and Joint Task Force-Full Accounting; and, most especially, the families and friends of those we mourn today: seven Americans and nine Vietnamese--servicemen who were, in every sense, healers and peacemakers.

Soldiers of nations once divided, they were united in a common cause, and they were embarked on a mission of peace--to return lost warriors home to those who love them. Tragically, while these 16 pursued their humanitarian mission of reconciliation, their lives were cut short on a mountain veiled in mist.

Words cannot ease the pain of those who loved them, as a husband or a son, or a friend or a colleague. But all of us who are grateful to them, for their devotion to duty and to their comrades, mourn their passing with a fervent hope in the words of Isaiah that *"the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain."* That *"on this mountain, the Lord will provide for all peoples . . . and remove the veil that veils all people . . . and wipe away the tears from every face."*

Their sudden loss reminds that, in peace or in war, those who venture into harm's way in a spirit of willing service, assume exceptional risks. The men we mourn today died because they wanted to help others. And help others they did.

Everyone who worked with these men understood and admired their devotion and dedication. We have some idea of the loss that their loved ones are suffering, and we grieve with you. We grieve at your deep heartache. This morning, I met with Andrea Cory [wife of Lieutenant Colonel Rennie Cory], and with Susan Martin [wife of Lieutenant Colonel George Martin], and with George and Thelma Martin, Colonel Martin's parents.

To his friends, Lieutenant Colonel Rennie Cory, the detachment's leader, was "the Airborne Ranger personified." His search for those lost in Vietnam took him to the land where his father had served a generation before. Rennie once told his dad, "All of a sudden, you are here, and you have a mission to let a family know: you found him." Rennie was about to hand the reigns over to Lieutenant Colonel "Marty" Martin. Before he left for Vietnam, Marty told his father, "Dad, I can't wait to get over there." He was eager to take on the mission of bringing certainty and solace to the families of other servicemen.

We have received home seven brave companions, and we have entrusted them to a peaceful rest. Mr. Que, we wish the same for the nine brave sons of Vietnam, who gave their lives in the service of your nation. We mourn with their families, and offer our deepest gratitude for their assistance, so instrumental

to the accounting efforts which, since the beginning, have returned more than 600 Americans home.

Today, as we remember the sacrifice of kinsmen and countrymen, let us remember what President Abraham Lincoln said at Gettysburg 150 years ago -- that "it is for us, the living to be dedicated to the unfinished work which they so nobly advanced." Our resolve is strengthened by their example. Secretary Rumsfeld has said: "our mission will continue."

On behalf of those we honor today, on behalf of those still missing, we rededicate ourselves to the fullest possible accounting of every American. We offer our deepest thanks to our Vietnamese colleagues who grieve with us, and who will renew with us the charge of our valiant dead.

For the families, the friends, the colleagues of those still missing, I would recall the words of a truly wise man, words that someone read to me when I had suffered a deep personal loss. He said that those who have passed away still live among us "in the good deeds they have done and in the hearts of those who cherish their memories."

The souls we honor today--Lieutenant Colonel Rennie Cory Jr., Lieutenant Colonel George Martin, Major Charles Lewis, Sergeant 1st Class Tommy Murphy, Master Sergeant Steven Moser, Chief Petty Officer Pedro Gonzalez, Technical Sergeant Robert Flynn, and their nine Vietnamese colleagues -- will long live on in the work they have done and the work that their comrades will continue to do. Their good deeds and their lives of honor will not only endure, but they will strengthen the cause for which they sacrificed.

On behalf of our commander in chief, President Bush, on behalf of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, on behalf of everyone who serves our nation's defense, we say good-bye to comrades of two nations who died in pursuit of one noble purpose. For many who mourned the unexplained loss of a loved one, they did much to remove the veil of uncertainty and reveal the light of knowledge. God bless them, God bless the loved ones they left behind, and God bless the nations they served so well.