

**Remarks As Given By  
The Honorable Thomas E. White  
Secretary Of The Army  
POW/MIA Recognition Day Ceremony  
Arlington National Cemetery  
21 Sep 01**

- AMBASSADOR GHAZZAHI, AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES OF OUR FRIENDS AND ALLIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD;
- DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF CONGRESS;
- DISTINGUISHED OFFICIALS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE;
- GENERAL SHINSEKI AND FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES;
- THE MANY BRAVE VETERANS HERE, INCLUDING OUR RETURNED PRISONERS OF WAR;
- THE FAMILIES OF OUR MISSING, WHO ARE AMERICAN HEROES IN THEIR OWN RIGHT;
- DISTINGUISHED GUESTS;
- LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US ON THIS BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THIS MOST SACRED PLACE. AT A TIME WHEN OUR FREE AND DEMOCRATIC WAY OF LIFE IS BEING THREATENED, IT IS TRULY INSPIRING TO SEE PATRIOTS LIKE YOU - GATHERING IN OUR NATION'S CAPITOL TO RECOGNIZE OUR RETURNED PRISONERS OF WAR AND HOLDING FAST TO OUR COMMITMENT TO THOSE AMERICANS WHO STILL REMAIN MISSING AND UNACCOUNTED FOR. YOUR PRESENCE HERE TODAY MAKES THIS A VERY MEANINGFUL, SPECIAL, AND PROFOUNDLY MOVING COMMEMORATION.

DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WOLFOWITZ ASKED ME TO EXTEND HIS DEEP REGRETS FOR BEING UNABLE TO ATTEND TODAY'S CEREMONY. AT THIS MOMENT, HE IS MEETING WITH OUR NATION'S TOP MILITARY LEADERS REGARDING AMERICA'S RESPONSE TO THE BARBARIC TERRORIST ATTACKS OF 11 SEPTEMBER. BUT I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT NO ONE IN WASHINGTON IS MORE DEDICATED TO ACCOUNTING FOR OUR MISSING IN ACTION THAN PAUL WOLFOWITZ - AND HE WOULD BE HERE IF HE COULD.

NOT FAR FROM HERE, A CHARRED AND UGLY GASH BEARS STARK WITNESS THAT EVIL ITSELF INVADDED THE PENTAGON'S WALLS LAST WEEK. BUT NOT LONG AFTER, FIREFIGHTERS AND SOLDIERS UNFURLED A LARGE AMERICAN FLAG NEAR THAT ANGRY WOUND. THAT FLAG IS A VIVID TESTAMENT TO A GREATER TRUTH - NO ONE THAT COMES INTO OUR HOUSE CAN DESTROY ITS FOUNDATIONS - THE IDEALS UPON WHICH OUR MILITARY SERVICES, INDEED OUR NATION, ARE BUILT.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN SAID OF THE CIVIL WAR THAT SO SORELY TESTED THESE IDEALS: "THIS IS A STRUGGLE FOR MAINTAINING IN THE WORLD THAT FORM AND SUBSTANCE OF GOVERNMENT WHOSE LEADING OBJECT IS TO ELEVATE THE CONDITION OF MEN."

AMERICANS KNOW THAT ONLY A GOVERNMENT BASED ON FREEDOM AND A RESPECT FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL CAN TRULY ELEVATE THE CONDITION OF EACH ONE OF US. THESE IDEALS SHAPE OUR NATION. THEY FUEL OUR PROGRESS. THEY MAKE US A BEACON FOR THOSE WHO LOVE LIBERTY AROUND THE WORLD.

THE WORLD KNOWS WE ARE RELUCTANT WARRIORS. BUT WHENEVER SOME NATION OR SOMEONE HAS THREATENED US AND THE LIBERTIES WE HOLD DEAR, WE HAVE TAKEN ON THAT STRUGGLE, LED BY THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO WEAR OUR NATION'S UNIFORM.

TODAY, WE ARE PREPARED TO DO SO AGAIN. WE WILL TAKE ON THE STRUGGLE TO DEFEAT THE EVIL OF TERRORISM FACING OUR NATION AND ALL FREEDOM-LOVING PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD. AND, AS PRESIDENT BUSH SAID LAST NIGHT IN HIS ADDRESS TO CONGRESS AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE: "WE WILL NOT TIRE, WE WILL NOT FALTER, AND WE WILL NOT FAIL."

WHEN WE GO TO WAR, PART OF OUR SACRED COVENANT WITH THE CITIZENS WHO WEAR OUR COUNTRY'S UNIFORM IS THAT SHOULD THEY FALL ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE, WE WILL DO ALL IN OUR POWER TO FIND THEM AND BRING THEM HOME WITH THE HONOR AND DIGNITY THEY DESERVE.

WE HAVE WATCHED THESE PAST TWO WEEKS AS FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF THOSE STILL UNACCOUNTED FOR KEEP A STEADY VIGIL NEAR THE PENTAGON, HOPING FOR ANSWERS. EACH ONE OF US WHO WORKS WITHIN THOSE WALLS KNOWS SOMEONE WHO FEARED FOR OUR SAFETY ON THAT DARK DAY. AND EACH ONE OF US FEELS A DEEP SENSE OF LOSS FOR THOSE AMONG US WHO WERE TAKEN SO SUDDENLY, SO BRUTALLY.

WE HAVE ALL SEEN IMAGES OF PEOPLE WANDERING THE STREETS OF MANHATTAN, SEARCHING EVERY HOSPITAL FOR MISSING LOVED ONES - EACH A PRECIOUS GIFT OF GOD WITH HOPES, DREAMS, FAMILY, AND FRIENDS. AS A NATION, WE BEGIN TO GRASP HOW UNTHINKABLE, HOW TERRIBLE, IS UNCERTAINTY.

MANY OF YOU HERE TODAY HAVE LONG UNDERSTOOD WHAT THOUSANDS NOW FACE. MORE THAN MOST AMERICANS, YOU KNOW THE AGONY OF THE LONELY HOURS, THE THIN DIVIDE BETWEEN FEAR AND HOPE THAT SO MANY HAVE LIVED IN THE LAST 10 DAYS - AND ARE STILL LIVING TODAY.

YOU KNOW THAT THE SOULS WHO WAIT HAVE PUT THEIR HOPE IN THE SEARCH - SOME HAVE BEGUN TO ACCEPT THAT AN ANSWER, EVEN ONE OF LOSS, IS FAR BETTER THAN NO ANSWER AT ALL. YOU UNDERSTAND THE DEPTHS OF THEIR UNCERTAINTY, FOR YOURS HAS CONTINUED FOR DECADES - 10, 25, OR EVEN 50 YEARS.

AND FOR AS MANY YEARS, MANY OF YOU GATHERED HERE HAVE KEPT YOUR OWN VIGIL, KNOWING, JUST AS THE RESCUE WORKERS WHO LABOR ON UNDETERRED, HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO WAITING FAMILIES TO CONTINUE THE SEARCH FOR ANSWERS. WE PRAY THAT THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN LOST ON OUR OWN SOIL WILL BE ACCOUNTED FOR AND SOON. WE HAVE SEEN ENERGY AND EFFORT ON A HERCULEAN SCALE DEDICATED TO THAT VERY END.

THE SAME HERCULEAN SPIRIT HAS CHARACTERIZED THE EFFORTS OF SO MANY HERE IN THE RECOVERY OF AMERICA'S SERVICEMEN AND CIVILIANS WHO WERE AND STILL ARE MISSING AND UNACCOUNTED FOR FROM OUR NATION'S WARS.

AS MANY OF YOU KNOW, THEIR RECOVERY AND RETURN COMES ONLY AFTER YEARS OF PAINSTAKING AND SOMETIMES DANGEROUS EFFORT - IN NEGOTIATIONS, THROUGH UNILATERAL EFFORTS BY THE GOVERNMENTS WHOSE COOPERATION WE SEEK, BY INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS, FROM FIELD OPERATIONS AT INCIDENT SITES, AND THROUGH DEDICATED FORENSIC ANALYSIS.

NOW MORE THAN EVER, I RENEW OUR PLEDGE TO YOU THAT AMERICA WILL CONTINUE THE NOBLE WORK OF RETURNING OUR MISSING HOME TO THE COUNTRY THEY LOVED AND SERVED SO WELL, A TASK MANY OF YOU HAVE PURSUED WITH GREAT DEDICATION.

NOW MORE THAN EVER, LET NATIONS AROUND THE WORLD UNDERSTAND THAT WE, AS AMERICANS, VALUE OUR WAY OF LIFE, THAT WE VALUE EACH PERSON WHO CONTRIBUTES TO IT, AND WHO FIGHTS TO PRESERVE IT. WE ARE DETERMINED TO CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS TO FREE ALL THE FAMILIES OF OUR MISSING MEN FROM THE PRISON OF UNCERTAINTY WHENEVER AND WHEREVER POSSIBLE.

WHETHER FROM DESERT STORM, THE VIETNAM WAR, THE KOREAN WAR, THE COLD WAR OR WORLD WAR TWO, FINDING OUR MISSING IS AN OBLIGATION WE OWE TO THOSE WHO SERVE AND TO THEIR FAMILIES - PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE - AND WE WILL HONOR IT BY GIVING THIS TASK OUR FULL EFFORT.

TO THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE LED THE QUEST FOR ANSWERS, YOUR NATION THANKS YOU - FOR YOUR TRAVELS TO VIETNAM, LAOS AND CAMBODIA; FOR YOUR VISITS TO NORTH KOREA, RUSSIA AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA; FOR YOUR COUNTLESS MEETINGS WITH FOREIGN OFFICIALS; FOR THE THOUSANDS OF MILES YOU'VE WALKED THROUGH THE HALLS OF OUR GOVERNMENT, TELLING THE STORIES OF YOUR HUSBANDS, SONS, FATHERS, BROTHERS, AND LOVED ONES.

YOUR TIRELESS EFFORTS REMIND US OF OUR SACRED DUTY AS AMERICANS. YOU ALSO REMIND US OF WHY THIS NATION HAS EXISTED FOR OVER TWO CENTURIES - THE LAST BEST, GREAT HOPE OF EARTH.

DURING THE PAST WEEK, ONE COMMENTATOR CAPTURED THE ESSENCE OF OUR NATION. HE SAID, "THE UNITED STATES HAD A SPIRIT BEFORE IT HAD A NAME, ONE OF FAITH AND FREEDOM, OF AMBITION TEMPERED BY GOODNESS."

THIS SPIRIT OF FAITH AND FREEDOM ENSURES WE WILL NEVER FORGET OUR OWN. AND THIS SPIRIT WILL ENSURE OUR NATION'S SEARCH FOR ANSWERS WILL ULTIMATELY LEAD US TO JUSTICE.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WE ARE TRULY HONORED TO HAVE WITH US AS OUR KEYNOTE SPEAKER AN AMERICAN HERO WHOSE SPIRIT GUIDED HIM THROUGH THE HELL OF THE HANOI HILTON AND NEVER ALLOWED HIM TO LOSE FAITH THAT HE'D RETURN TO OUR LAND OF FREEDOM.

ON NOVEMBER 11, 1966, JUST ONE DAY AFTER CELEBRATING THE MARINE CORPS BIRTHDAY, MARINE AVIATOR ORSON SWINDLE WAS FLYING HIS 205<sup>TH</sup> - AND WHAT WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN HIS LAST - COMBAT MISSION. IN ONE TRAGIC MOMENT OVER NORTH VIETNAM, HIS FINAL MISSION ENDED WITH A BRUTAL FINALITY THAT WOULD LEAD TO MORE THAN SIX YEARS AS A PRISONER OF WAR.

ORSON SWINDLE HAS SERVED OUR NATION AS AN OFFICER, AS A PRISONER OF WAR WHO NEVER LOST FAITH, AND IN MANY SUCCEEDING POSTS IN PRESIDENT REAGAN'S ADMINISTRATION AND IN HIS CURRENT POSITION AS A FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSIONER.

OUR SPEAKER ONCE DESCRIBED A FORMER CELLMATE IN THESE WORDS: "HE KNOWS WHAT PAIN MEANS. HE KNOWS WHAT SACRIFICE MEANS." THESE WORDS APPLY EVERY BIT AS MUCH TO ORSON SWINDLE.

THE MOTTO OF HIS FAMILY'S SCOTTISH CLAN IS "NEVER FORGET." AND ONE OF HIS FAVORITE QUOTES COMES FROM WINSTON CHURCHILL: "NEVER, NEVER GIVE UP."

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PLEASE WELCOME AN AMERICAN HERO WHO HAS NEVER GIVEN UP HIS INTEGRITY, HIS IDEALS, OR HIS ENTHUSIASM FOR OUR COUNTRY.

HE EMBODIES THE HIGHEST VIRTUES OF OUR GREAT REPUBLIC, A LIVING REMINDER OF THE DEPTH OF SACRIFICE THAT CAN BE ASKED OF THOSE WHO WEAR OUR NATION'S UNIFORM, RETIRED MARINE LIEUTENANT COLONEL ORSON SWINDLE.

[Click here to go to Lieutenant Colonel Orson Swindel's Speech](#)