

## POW/MIA Prayer Breakfast

*Remarks by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, Crystal City Gateway Marriott, Crystal City, VA, Thursday, February 7, 2002.*

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Thank you, Jerry [Jennings, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs]. Your introduction reminds me of a story, a true story, when Daniel Patrick Moynihan ran for the United States Senate in 1976 against Jim Buckley -- probably two of the most powerful intellects in American public life. They were about five or ten minutes into their first debate when then-Senator Buckley, later Judge Buckley, referred to Moynihan as an intellectual. And Moynihan said, "This debate is only ten minutes old and already people are throwing mud." [Laughter.]

The truth is, as valuable as intellect is, character is much more important than intellect, and the people in this room are testimony to character. Jerry, you yourself are testimony to character. This cause could not have a more qualified and dedicated advocate than Jerry Jennings. When Jerry went to Vietnam as a young Marine he served with Americans who have yet to come home, and I know their memory inspires him as he leads our team to bring them and all of our missing home. I also know that the North Koreans who dealt with Jerry recently know that he has character.

Stacey [Andrews, wife of Desert Storm POW], those moving words about your husband's capture and the ordeal that you went through remind us not only the depth of sacrifice that is asked of those who wear our nation's uniform, but also the depth of sacrifice that is asked of their families. Thank you for being here today.

When we were waiting for breakfast, Jerry took me to the end of the line and he said it's a Marine Corps tradition. He said the officers eat last. If they haven't provided enough food, they're the ones who pay the price for it. I think that too is character.

We have at least two other Marines that I'd like to mention. My military assistant, who's a Marine lieutenant colonel, reminds me often that there's no such thing as an ex-Marine, but we do have two retired Marines here. One very distinguished former POW, now Federal Trade Commissioner, Lieutenant Colonel Marine Corps (Ret.) Orson Swindle.

Orson Swindle was shot down and taken into captivity one day after the Marine Corps birthday on what would have been his last combat mission. But true to his favorite saying from Churchill, he never gave up. He never gave up faith that he would return home to a land of freedom, and he's never forgotten the comrades that he left behind.

Another retired Marine, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Robin Higgins, is with us today. She now serves as Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs in the Veterans Administration. Her husband, another Marine, Lieutenant Colonel Rich Higgins, and I hope this is a purple ceremony; bravery is cross-service, let's make that clear. Rich Higgins was an extraordinary American who went to Lebanon to serve with the UN mission. He was captured by terrorists. He was brutally murdered. Our country mourned his death and we all marveled at Robin's courage through her personal ordeal and in the years since, and her dedication to this cause. Thank you, Robin.

One other special person to me here, Ann Mills Griffith with the National League of Families, an old friend for many years. She's been one of the true leaders in the fight for the policy and

the resources to enable our government to support the tireless work of our men and women working on behalf of our mission. And I might say, for as long as I've known her, which is nearly 20 years now, she has been educating me and other people in positions of responsibility about what our obligation is to our Missing in Action.

But to all our members of the Armed Forces who join us here today from all services, active duty, guard and reserve; the many brave veterans here including, particularly, our returned POWs; the families of our missing who can be called America's heroes in your own right; the men and women who work to bring them home; and, if there's anyone left, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It's an honor to be here this morning. I feel very humbled after hearing Stacey's presentation. I almost thought you really don't need to hear any more speeches. But let me just say briefly about this cause which is close to my heart, there's no more fitting gathering of patriots with whom to gather and pray.

Over the past several months particularly, I've come to understand what Abraham Lincoln must have felt during those dark days of the Civil War when he said, "I've been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go."

From the warmth of this gathering I must say I go to the goodwill of a budget hearing. So I particularly need your prayers this morning. [Laughter.]

Stacey helped us understand something of the ordeal that is suffered by families of the missing. As terrible as hers was, it was blessedly short. Her words help us to understand the indomitable spirit that still motivates people who are still waiting to find out what happened to their loved ones.

Despite a broken leg and brutal beatings as a prisoner in a foreign land, Captain Bill Andrews came out of that crucible of suffering as one who still listened to God. He displayed a humble but unbroken spirit, reminding us of the prophet Samuel who said, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." His prayer was answered and his spirit renewed.

And as Bill later recalled, throughout the ordeal he said, "I had faith in my country and I knew that I would never be forgotten."

I'm told that Bill Andrews tells a story about how he thought he would never be forgotten by one particular captor, the unlucky fellow who stole his watch. It was the kind of big, complicated watch that pilots are known to like. And about that watch Bill observed, "The guy who took it may have gotten the watch, but he'd need lots of luck to figure out how to turn off the alarm." [Laughter.] And since Bill had set it to wake himself up at 0-dark-30, he took some pleasure in thinking it would be waking that fellow up for a long time.

Like so many of the POWs who endured such imprisonment with honor, Bill proved the truth in the words, "They may imprison the body but not the soul." We can take comfort in these same words for those whose fate is still known only to God.

Many of you have understood for a long time what most of America glimpsed on September 11th. More than most, you understand the agony of lonely hours, the thin divide between hope and fear that became real for so many on that dark Tuesday.

For some of you your vigil of uncertainty has continued for decades-10 or 25 or sometimes even 50 years. Some of you understand keenly how hope eventually goes into the search, knowing that an answer, even an answer that is of a definitive loss, is far better than no answer at all.

We take comfort in the words of Isaiah. "Thus says the Lord who created the heavens, who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk on it. I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice. I have grasped you by the hand." To the Lord for whom not a sparrow falls to the ground without his knowing it, no one can ever disappear.

And not one of our missing will ever disappear from the thoughts of those who labor so tirelessly to bring them home. A heroic spirit has long characterized the efforts of so many year, so many others working to recover our missing servicemen and civilians, missing and unaccounted for from our nation's wars.

As many of you know, their recovery and return comes only after years of painstaking effort. The words of Jeremiah have given many of you comfort, "Thus sayeth the Lord, refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears for thy work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, and they shall come home again from the land of the enemy."

Today it is fitting to remember in our prayers the seven Americans and their nine Vietnamese colleagues who were part of these efforts and who perished in a helicopter crash last spring. They were on a mission to return lost warriors to those who loved them, and their loss is a reminder that those who venture into harm's way in a spirit of willing service assume extraordinary risks. Those men and those Americans we have lost in the war on terror died because they wanted to help others, and help others they have.

All those Americans lost in service also served a greater ideal. They served a nation that is founded on democratic principles, on the rule of law, on the dignity of the individual. The basis of the democratic experiment that is America was understood by our Founding Fathers and expressed in these words of William Penn, "If we will not be governed by God then we must be governed by tyrants."

A government based on the ideals of freedom and a respect for each individual shapes our nation. They fuel our progress. They make us a beacon for those who love liberty around the world. They draw millions to these shores who want to escape the tyrant's grip and forge a better life.

As a nation, we go to war reluctantly, but whenever we or the liberties we hold dear have been threatened, we have taken on the struggle, and when we go to war we do so with a sacred compact with the citizens who wear our country's uniform. Should they fall on the field of battle, we will do all in our power to find them and bring them home.

That compact sustained Bill Andrews through the hell of captivity, as it has so many others. That compact sustains the families of those who are still missing. It sustains us as we give the task of bringing them home our very best efforts. And as we do so, it is with the same resolve of Winston Churchill and Orson Swindle -- we will "never give up."

In that spirit, I ask the leaders of those nations in which our men are still missing to respond to our appeals. Their cooperation will be recognized and appreciated by a grateful American nation. For despite the differences that may exist, families who endure uncertainty about a missing loved one share a burden that can end only with answers.

As we seek these answers we are mindful to our promise to our fellow countrymen, the same solemn promise the Lord made to his servant Joshua, "I will not fail you or forsake you.

May God bless those who have returned from captivity and those yet to return. May God bless the loved ones who are left behind. And may God bless this wonderful country that they served so well. [Applause.]

