



**FULFILLING OUR PROMISES**  
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

Remarks of  
Ronald F. Hope,  
National Commander - Elect  
To the  
Delegates of the 93<sup>rd</sup>  
DAV National Convention  
Las Vegas, Nevada  
Tuesday, August 12, 2014

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Thank you everyone for that very warm welcome.

I could spend the next two hours thanking individuals who were instrumental in my development as a National Service Officer for 31 years and in the last two years as a National Line Officer.

I won't take that much of your time, but I must thank some of them:

- First and foremost are my first family, my **Mother**, who stayed by my side for most of the eight months I spent at Brooke Army Medical Center in 1969-1970;
- My daughter, Ronda Wilson, her husband Dusty and my grandchildren, Pete and Addison, for their support while I travel.
- My second family, the Department of North Carolina;
- The 9<sup>th</sup> NEC: Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina;
- The Department of Texas;
- The NSOs in Winston-Salem;
- My Administrative Assistant for 25 years, Etta Ratledge, for correcting my grammar, spelling and sentence structure.
- Don Samuels and Wally Tyson for their guidance in adjusting to the fraternal side of the DAV.
- Art and Mary Wilson and Dennis and Maxine Nixon for their friendship and mentorship on the many occasions when I needed it.
- All the employees in Cold Spring, Kentucky and Washington, DC, for keeping me "on track" during the past 35 years.

- Rodney Tucker, Bobby Williams and Ken Wolfe for their assistance during my tenure on the line and all the NSOs.
- And members nationwide who, without their support, I wouldn't be standing here today as your National Commander.
- Last, but certainly not least, a very special thank you to Victor and Anita Diaschenko, Doug Russell and Dennis Nixon, who helped me "come home" many years after July 15, 1969. Doug isn't with us any more, but we were just a few feet away in the same hooch in Vietnam.
- Finally, I'd like the members of Bravo, 227, here today, please stand. We made a commitment together to never leave one of our own behind. If we hadn't, I wouldn't be here today.

That's what it's all about. Veterans serving veterans.

When I became a part of DAV more than three decades ago, I never dreamed I would be addressing my fellow veterans and members of our DAV family as your National Commander.

Commander Johnston, National Adjutant Burgess and most importantly, my fellow veterans, I want you to know it is a position I do not take lightly.

I know I have some very big boots to fill as Commander Johnston accomplished some amazing feats on his watch.

Joe, you've been a great mentor and an even better friend. Thank you for your contributions. You end your tenure as Commander with DAV in better shape than it was when you came in, and your leadership has been inspiring to all of us.

Friends, we've had a busy year. And, rest assured, we're going to get busier.

As our weary nation winds down from combat operations after nearly 13 years of war, those veterans will be making that very challenging evolution that we've all experienced ourselves.

The transition out of uniform and back to your civilian life is difficult. But that's where DAV is at its best.

I'm very proud to say I spent 31 years as a National Service Officer and helping veterans make that transition often begins with our NSOs and TSOs.

This past year, when Washington D.C. couldn't stop squabbling and playing partisan politics, the government, as you all will remember, shut down. Many of our NSO offices are located inside V-A Medical Centers and this could have presented a problem.

I cannot tell you how proud I am that, while the government shut down, DAV's services to veterans did not. Our NSOs developed a "Plan B" and many of you worked out of our mobile offices or tents and tables in parking lots.

That's where the rubber meets the road for DAV, and I want all of our NSOs and TSOs to know our leadership certainly appreciates the hard work you men and women do each day for our veterans.

We also have busy times ahead as we continue the fight for passage of the Putting Veterans Funding First Act.

This will ensure things like much needed equipment and infrastructure at V-A medical facilities is accomplished, during government shut downs that pension and disability checks do not stop flowing to those who've sacrificed for our nation.

DAV knows our partners at the V-A operate the largest health care system in the country and offer some of the finest health care in the world. We know they have our veterans' best interests at heart, although the actions of a few individuals have made it a challenging year for our partners at the V-A.

But recent events have, rightfully, outraged the nationwide community of veterans and the public at large. As it should.

And though the extent of secret waiting lists were carefully held, the result could have been predicted at any time over the last decade when recommendations from the Independent Budget were ignored.

The bottom line is, you can't effectively run any organization without effective funding, and DAV will continue to advocate before Congress to fully fund the V-A so it can provide the quality health care to our men and women who served. They deserve nothing less.

From the time I served in Vietnam, there was one theme that separated and raised the honor of our fighting forces.

It was our commitment that we never leave our own behind.

And yet, we as an organization recognize and must continue to ensure that this is the case for women veterans who made took the same oath and made the same commitment to their brothers when they served.

For too long, the word "veteran" has been associated as a purely masculine term. And while women veterans served with distinction in times war, they did not receive the benefits they had earned.

Our nation made the same promise to them and we need to welcome them to our ranks, give them the opportunities to lead and advocate for them with a single, unified voice.

DAV has led the advocacy effort for women veterans and I promise you we'll continue to do so.

Family, friends and fellow veterans, it will indeed be a busy year for DAV. We have many fights ahead of us – but we can not back down.

Let your local community leaders, stakeholders, elected officials and local Congressional Delegates know about veteran issues in your own backyards. Finally, there is an acronym I want all of you to know: DAV CAN.

Every one associated with DAV and their families should be members of the Commander's Action Network, or DAV CAN.

It ensures we get the word out to policy makers that we vote and we are going to fight to ensure our nation lives up to it's promises to the men and women who serve.

Finally, I plead with each of you to take on a mentoring role. Starting this year, we're going to see so many young men and women leaving military service. We need to reach out to them. We need to bring them into our organization and make them part of our community.

Don't count on them to understand the benefits available to them or the importance of our organization. Be ready to teach them, to reach out to them, to show them the impact we make in people's lives and to give them a role to serve.

I look forward to working with you all this year. It's an honor and a privilege to serve as your National Commander and I pledge to you I'll work tirelessly to ensure your voices are heard as we continue our more than ninety year mission of service to the men and women who raised their hand, said "send me," and went forward to conduct America's business when called.

Thank you.