

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

(Acknowledge any VIPs/special guests)

I am _____, with DAV—Disabled American Veterans—in ___[LOCATION]_____.

While service to America's returning ill and injured veterans is at the heart of what we do, another aspect of DAV is to lend our voice to support America's prisoners of war and those still missing in action.

Whether they served in the jungles of Vietnam, the sands of Iraq or other battlefields, they are owed every ounce of gratitude we can summon as a nation.

I'm proud to be an American for many reasons. But one is that we stand alone in the world when it comes to identifying, retrieving and honoring our nation's war dead.

Each year, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency—the arm of the Pentagon that works to reunite families with their loved ones— travels to battlefields around the world to bring the fullest accounting possible for our nation’s missing-in-action. As of this year, more than 81,000 Americans remain missing from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and the Gulf Wars.

That number is shocking. But numbers only tell you part of the story. The humanity is reflected in the lives of these soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coastguardsmen. They are still waiting for their final flight home.

We fight for their belated arrival and work to provide better care and a lifetime of support to their families and survivors. Ensuring they are looked after is one way to honor their veterans’ service and legacy.

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As you may know, DAV has former prisoners of war in our ranks. They include Kevin Hermening, a Marine who survived 444 days of captivity as a prisoner inside the U.S. Embassy in Iran.

In 1979, he stood frozen as thousands of Iranian protesters ran toward his position just outside the embassy building. Kevin quickly made it to safety, but that was short-lived as the complex was overrun.

For more than a year, he lived in horror. His captors would shake him awake in the middle of the night, place a gun to his head and pull the trigger. The guns were never loaded, thankfully, but the mock execution served as torture for Kevin and dozens of other Americans.

Army Colonel Charles Scott was beaten so severely during an interrogation that three of his teeth were broken off the gum line. That went untreated until after he was released.

The health of one of Kevin's friends, Bill Key-oh, declined visibly while in captivity. A hulking man at 6 feet 9 inches tall, Key-oh lost 80 pounds before being released. He died in 1985 from Lou Gehrig's disease.

Kevin and the others begged to have Bill seen by a doctor, but the Iranians refused. We'll never know if that would have had a difference, but in Kevin's words, "frankly, he was never given a chance."

But America being who we are, we couldn't just stand around and wait.

Six months into captivity, the U.S. launched a military operation, a rescue attempt. One that ended in tragedy.

On April 24, 1980, the ill-fated special operations mission saw three of the eight helicopters fail, prompting President Jimmy Carter to cancel the mission. That's when an American helicopter collided with a C-130, killing eight service members and injuring five.

When Kevin finally came home, he was lauded as a hero. But in true humility, he said those who didn't come home from that mission were the real and only heroes of the hostage crisis.

I had the chance to read Kevin's story in DAV Magazine and thought a lot about what he said about the men and women who put their lives on the line to bring Americans, wherever they are, home.

That is the spirit our nation continues to show. By partnering with governments worldwide, we hope to bring the same relief Kevin's mother felt to every family still waiting.

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The families of those still missing in action live with the reality that their loved ones, who never had the chance to be honored as veterans, will never again set foot inside their homes.

An empty chair at every dinner table, parents missing essential milestones in a child's life and those who will never know the missing part of their family. These are the costs paid in blood by those who stood up when their country called upon them.

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Stories like these are not lost entirely, merely frozen in time until we travel to the beaches, fields and jungles containing missing American service members. It seems these stories become reinvigorated every week when the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, or D-P-A-A, announces those whose remains have been identified and returned home decades after their war ended.

There are stories of Army Corporal Francis James Jury of Clearfield, Pennsylvania. He was 23 when he was killed in the Korean War near the Chosin Reservoir. He was listed missing on December 2, 1950. Following the battle, his remains could not be recovered, and there is no evidence that he was ever a prisoner of war.

I'm proud to say that he was fully accounted for on February 10, 2022. It's nothing short of a miracle.

In 2018, North Korea turned over 55 boxes, purported to contain the remains of American service members killed during the Korean War.

To identify Corporal Jury's remains, scientists from D-P-A-A used anthropological analysis, as well as circumstantial and DNA analysis. They leveraged every resource possible as if he were their own. Because he is our own.

His name is recorded at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, along with the others who are still missing from the Korean War.

A rosette will be placed next to his name to indicate he has been accounted for.

The remains of Corporal Jury will soon finally return home to be buried in his beloved Pennsylvania—a journey 72 years in the making.

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As the years pass and the memories of those sent off to war become more distant for many, we must keep in mind those whose personal experiences make it ever-present. Those who lived it and those who continue to wait—and wonder about—the ultimate fate of their loved ones.

We hope you will all join DAV in keeping in your heart our nation's POWs and our missing-in-action.

Thank you.

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