



National Convention Remarks

National Commander Elect Dennis Nixon

July 17, 2018

Good Afternoon and thank you so much.

Delphine, it has truly been an honor coming through the ranks with you. I want you to know I, and many gathered here, consider you a mentor and stellar advocate for the disabled veteran community.

I'm also privileged to call you a friend. Thank you for your leadership over the past year.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think it's important to recognize you **are** DAV. You are the ones carrying forth our important mission here and throughout the country. You deserve a tremendous amount of credit for how seriously and thoughtfully you conduct business on behalf of our organization.

For the better part of the last half-century, DAV has been a second calling to me. And throughout this whole time DAV has felt like a home to me. My fellow veterans, our spouses, caregivers and survivors have been my family.

Everyone I've ever met in this organization has a story. Each story is important and meaningful. Our connection with our cause is real. And our understanding of the definition of the word "sacrifice" is unique.

You wouldn't know it by looking at me now, but like many of you, there was a time in my life when I was young. And I was strong.

Out of high school, I enlisted. And in the Marine Corps, I found what I believed was my life calling.

I was young and fit – a lean, mean, fighting machine. I even had hair, but I kept it pretty tight – not quite as tight as it is now. But tight.

I've sort of transitioned that way, you know. I guess you could call me a jarhead without the lid.

But I loved the Marine Corps. I loved just about everything about it. I found my calling as a combat engineer. As a very young man, I was astonished that the United States government not only taught me how, but paid me to **blow things up**.

I made sergeant in 23 months and loved nearly every aspect of my job.

As many of you know, 1969 was a unique time for our nation's military. For those of us in Vietnam, it was a busy time. And it was often thrilling. And at other times frightening how much was happening.

This was especially true in our little part of the war in Danang. We were on day five of Operation Pipestone Canyon – a mission that was planned for two weeks but ended up lasting six months.

On June 5, we'd set up a command post and I realized I had lost my crimpers crossing a creek. Now, for those of you not familiar with that particular tool, it's hard to explain its importance.

But about the only other thing you might be able to use to attach a detonation cord to a blasting cap in the field is your teeth.

And, as I'm known for my good looks, I wasn't about to do that.

So, I left my radio man at the perimeter and was hiking back along Highway 4 to a position not too distant from where we had dug in, I was going to be for replacement crimpers from my lieutenant!

That's when I blew the last landmine of my military career.

Unlike the others, it wasn't an intentional demolition.

In an instant, the world I knew had changed forever. A Chinese Communist landmine ripped up through my body. As a result, I lost my left leg above the knee and sustained very serious injuries throughout my body.

My dream – the only future I could imagine -- of a career in the Marine Corps was over in an instant. It took 17 months of intensive care at Navy and VA hospitals for me to learn to walk.

But even then, I felt broke. I'd gone from being young and cocky to feeling useless.

I had been invincible and suddenly felt defeated.

But like so many of you here, I picked up the pieces. I spent the next two years working with my father in the family business and attended college. But I felt guilty knowing some of my fellow veterans were still in the fight. They were moving on and up in their careers, and that possibility had ended for me.

That all changed in 1972, when I was accepted into the DAV service officer program and assigned to the field office in Waco. Suddenly, I was back in the fight. I was making sure my fellow veterans weren't left behind. I was able to help them find justice. And that wasn't always easy to come by for Vietnam veterans.

I wouldn't be here today without the support of my best friend and the love of my life, Maxine. Combined, we are the proud parents of four and I'm a "Pepaw" to eight. As many of you with strong spouses can relate, she has made my work with DAV possible.

I feel perpetually blessed to include my DAV family as a source of strength and inspiration. Over the course of nearly 40 years at Waco, DAV gave me the opportunity to learn and to lead.

I'm grateful for my mentors – people like past National Adjutant Art Wilson, Adjutant Marc Burgess and the many leaders who've shaped my journey at the chapter, department and national levels.

DAV has given me lifelong friends – like past National Commander Ron Hope and so many others who share our passion and commitment to our cause. And I see the beginnings of a legacy that I helped form by recruiting and training others.

That includes John Kleindienst, National Voluntary Services Director, Rob Lougee, Assistant National Employment Director, Ron Minter, Assistant National Voluntary Service Director, Jennifer Kellogg, Area Seven Supervisor, and Don Warren, Supervisor of the Georgia National Service Office, just to name a few.

I feel a special kinship with the leaders and members of the DAV Department of Texas similar to the community of veterans throughout our organization.

If there's one thing I would leave all of you with today, it's to ask you to think about your DAV legacy.

DAV gives us the unique opportunity to empower and improve the lives of our fellow veterans. It helps us ensure promises are kept. We know our services are substantive and vital.

The seeds we plant today contribute to the legacy of our mission. Many of us remember World War II veterans in every elected position in our chapters. Some of us remember World War I veterans.

It's a strange thing when you realize you have become the "old guy" or gal at the meetings. For us Vietnam veterans, we may remember many different leaders who shaped our outlook on DAV – some for better, some for the worse.

Some of us may remember feeling discouraged when we presented ideas and they were shot down. Now, we are the ones calling the shots. If the organization is to continue and the work we're doing today is to endure, we need to be a voice of encouragement. We need to inspire. We need to thank people who are doing the right things.

We need to be mentors.

Even a blasting-cap-biting Marine can tell you the most effective weapon in a DAV leader's arsenal is a well-placed and sincere "thank you." It can make all the difference in the world to people who are donating their most precious commodity – their time. So, to those here today I say THANK YOU!

May God bless all the young men and women currently in harm's way, and May God bless all of you, and may God bless DAV.

And may God bless the USA.

And now, let's get to work.

Semper Fi.