

Some of you are aware, I know, of the very difficult decision I had to make last December. It was among the most difficult decisions of my Presidency. When we make decisions and when times are most difficult, we all seek a source of strength. I recall how you men looked to faith in God, and so did I. I recall how all of you looked to loyalty to your country's high principles, and so did I.

*Purpose of our  
stand in Vietnam*

I know too that you looked to comfort from your comrades.

Let me just add, that in those grave moments my thoughts often went to you and your families. I can assure you that there may have been times when you were alone and that I was alone -- but last December, your courage and the courage of your loved ones gave me a determination and hope that bridged the distance between us. I shall never forget that.

\* \* \* \* \*

Few cherish peace more than the warrior, for he knows best the ravage of war. By your service and the service of millions of your comrades who gave their service, their wounds or their lives, you hastened the coming of the peace.

The question will be asked as it is of all wars and all trials in life: "Was it worth it -- those years out of my life?" History's answer is yes. Your sacrifice not only helped us to honor our pledge to the 17 million people of Vietnam but also to lay the foundation for a generation of peace. All free people will always be thankful for that legacy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thoughts on Heroism

"Wars may cease, but the need for heroism shall not depart from the earth, while man remains man and evil exists to be redressed." Adm. Alfred Thayer Mahan -- 19th Century.

Justice Holmes once remarked that a hero touches all of us

"with the contagion of his courage."

*ask their help in the receipt of Subchapter*

*Tasks remaining, complete*

- 1. Show <sup>statute, complete</sup> agreement
- \* 2. account for the missing
- 3. contribute to rebuilding, need your support here as we build it to honor the spirit.
- 4. Maintain America strong

(Khachigian) DG

TAB A  
May 23, 1973

SUGGESTED REMARKS -- INTRODUCTORY REMARKS PRIOR  
TO DINNER

(Note: Following RN's welcoming remarks to the POWs before dinner, he will be introducing the POW Chaplain for an invocation. The POW Chaplain is Captain Charles R. Gillespie, USN. After the invocation Gillespie will introduce the POW Chorus to sing the POW Hymn. RN will probably want to allude to the POW Chorus before the invocation begins.)

I want you to know how proud we are to have you as our guests this evening. Pat and I may be your hosts for the evening, but I know grateful Americans everywhere throughout our great land are your true hosts tonight.

*And your presence here is symbolic of the tribute <sup>American</sup> <sup>not only</sup> ~~paid~~ to you, but to all those who served, fought, were wounded or killed for their country in the course of this difficult*

My staff tells me this is the biggest dinner ever held at the White House. I think that is important because I can't think of a bigger or better occasion that could be held at the White House.

\*\*\*

Someone told me about your housing facilities while you are in Washington. I think you would agree with me that it's a long way from the Hanoi Hilton to the Washington Hilton.

\*\*\*

I hope no one objects to the fact that we are having an American menu this evening. I specifically ordered that there be no pumpkins, turnips or rice.

\* \* \*

As you know, the American flag which flew over Clark Air Base on your first arrival is flying tonight over the White House. Just as that flag symbolized your return to Clark it is also a token tonight of how welcome you are in this home.

\* \* \*

Just one more thing, I know that you gentlemen are more than familiar with the term "debriefing." You will notice that there are many fine domestic wines and champagnes on our menu tonight. Please do me a favor and don't bother to give any debriefings on this dinner tomorrow morning.

# # #

~~This letter is signed~~

(Khachigian et. al.) DG

May 23, 1973

SUGGESTED REMARKS: TOAST TO POWs

(Note: Brigadier General John Flynn, in responding to RN's toast, will express gratitude to RN, American people, and the services. He never lost faith in pledges of Commander in Chief. He may refer obliquely to December bombing.

During toast remarks, Flynn will introduce two junior officers who, with him, will present RN with a plaque in token of the POWs' esteem.

While in prison the POWs, on holidays, proposed toasts to RN as Commander in Chief. Flynn will explain that tradition and the toast will be offered in the same way that it was in prison.

It is now expected that RN will toast only the POWs. As a surprise, you may want to ask the POWs to rise in a second toast -- (to their families and loved ones.)

\*\*\*

*al Hunt*  
*Genl*

Before I begin, I know you will want to join me in a brief moment of silence in honor of your comrades who gave their lives, those who lie wounded, and those who have not yet been accounted for.

\*\*\*

As we sang our National Anthem tonight, my thoughts drew back in history to another war and to a prisoner of war named Francis Scott Key. He wanted to know during his captivity whether the "Star

"Spangled Banner" still waved "over the land of the free and the home of the brave."

We knew that the same question was in your minds throughout your long ordeal, and we did everything we could to let you know that the flag under which you had served was still flying high and would continue to for as long as it took to bring you home with your heads held high.

Because of your sacrifices and your heroism, Americans can salute our flag more proudly and feel the meaning of our Anthem more deeply than we ever have before.

Because you kept faith with America, America has gained new faith in itself.

\* \* \*

RN ANECDOTE FROM MARCH 29 SPEECH

One of the most moving moments of my Presidency came this spring when I talked to a man who had spent almost 8 years in a Communist prison camp in North Vietnam. For over 4 years he was in solitary confinement. He lived on two meals a day, usually just a piece of bread, a bowl of soup. All he was given to read was Communist propaganda. All he could listen to was the Communist propaganda on radio.

I asked him how he was able to survive it and come home, standing tall and proud, saluting the American flag. He paused for a long time before he answered. And then he said, "It is difficult for me to answer. I am not very good at words. All I can say is that it was faith -- faith in God and faith in my country."

If men who suffered so much for America can have such faith, let us who have received so much from America renew our faith -- our faith in God, our faith in our country, and our faith in ourselves.

\* \* \*

Throughout the long ordeal in Vietnam, all of us were gravely concerned about our prisoners of war.

Now that these valiant men have returned to our shores, along with two-and-one-half million of their comrades who also served in Vietnam, we must all become guardians of peace.

Through the efforts of the American serviceman in Vietnam, we are close to a goal that we have only been able to dream about for nearly 20 years: prosperity without war.

We must now wage the peace with the same determination and faith that we waged the war.

\* \* \*

We not only honor you men tonight, because you know better than I that an equal drama played itself in our land. Your wives, children, parents, and all your friends and relatives underwent the most difficult personal ordeals in your absence. I know that as we honor you, you won't want us to forget the great words of the poet, Milton: "They also serve who only stand and wait." And I assure you that they, too, served with distinction and courage.

\* \* \*

*Good* [The ~~outstanding~~ conduct of the ~~vast majority~~ of the prisoners <sup>has proved</sup> during this long and bitter ordeal ~~proves~~ that the American fighting man today stands just as tall as the men who fought at Concord, at Gettysburg, at Guadalcanal and at Inchon. Long after the bitterness and controversy surrounding the political side of this conflict have been forgotten, the heroic conduct of the American fighting man in Vietnam will be remembered.

\* \* \*

May 23, 1973

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE TOAST

General Flynn:

Believes that the President's toast should be brief and that the POWs' presence that evening fully bespeaks RN's feelings towards them. He feels that an accolade would be almost redundant. The POWs, says Flynn, don't consider themselves unique, so that RN might say that the POWs are a symbol of what the services produced. He feels that the POWs are simply the results of fate's random selection. Since the services reflect the civilian population, the accolade ought to be to the services.

Admiral Stockdale:

Admiral Stockdale felt there were a number of points RN might consider. Stockdale believes that the POWs won a battle of their own in encouraging the North Vietnamese to improve their treatment. While RN was working effectively on the outside to obtain their freedom, the POWs were showing strength within the camps to undermine the North Vietnamese torture program.

From 1965 on, resistance began in an organized way. POWs operated as a military unit (later to be named the Fourth Allied POW Wing -- see fact sheet) to preserve the honor of the individuals and the U.S. One important impact of the Sontay mission was to cause the relocation of all the POWs into a central area, making organization and resistance more possible.

When the POWs were reduced to imprisonment without life's amenities, they gravitated to basic values: faith, loyalty to country and loyalty to the President. Stockdale also pointed out that some POWs were not in this chain of organization and references to it should not be all inclusive (i. e., collaborations).

Stockdale strongly believes some mention should be made of POWs dying during internment and the MLAs.

General Scowcroft:

RN should pursue the theme he has before: how proud we are, what an uplift there is to the national spirit, how the manner of their return ended the conflict on an upbeat -- with the POWs heads held high.

The conflict was larger than just Vietnam. We were there and played a role in such a way that our allies could have confidence in our reliability and our enemies would respect our integrity and willingness to stand.

Roger Shields (DOD Director. Project Homecoming):

Commend the families who were under the most difficult pressures -- they matched the sacrifices of their loved ones. They stood tall though they had the greatest right of anyone to ask for immediate return. Also mention the MIAs (the "unaccounted for") and those who died in imprisonment.

Bill Timmons:

Yes  
Not the appropriate forum to criticize the Congress directly, but a line or two is necessary about not reducing defense funds -- same theme as in Norfolk. The U.S. is the only country which stands up and can be counted upon. We can't be weak.

Dick Moore:

Upbeat and straightforward.

Bill Barodv:

Yes  
RN should broaden the focus to include all veterans. A good forum to designate a day in honor of all Vietnam veterans.

# # #

May 23, 1973

SUPPLEMENTAL REMARKS: POW RECEPTION AT STATE DEPARTMENT

The easiest thing to do when peace is achieved is to turn inward; to be concerned only with ourselves; to let our guard down; to rest our inner resources.

That would be a tragic mistake because the greatest threats to peace can come when the threats appear to be least apparent.

You don't disband the fire department after the fire has been extinguished. And I assure you today, I am not going to preside over the dismantling of our national defense when the greatest promise for a generation of peace is still at hand.

\* \* \*

Talking about peace is much easier than keeping the peace. Those who talk of peace do so by calling for reductions in the defense budget. Those who act for peace know that we can do so only when we have a strong national defense.

Those who talk of peace believe the world will become less belligerent if we simply do not talk belligerently. But those who act for peace know that we can't negotiate with words if we cannot act with more than words.

Those who talk of peace may believe that strength is a bellicose word, but those who act for peace know that strength is more than a word when negotiations are underway.

\* \* \*

The cause in which you fought so well and sacrificed so much was the cause of peace. And that means not a phony peace, not a paper peace, not a temporary peace that would last a hundred days and then be ripped apart by the guns of renewed aggression.

You laid your lives on the line for a real peace, one that would last, so that the children of Indochina could grow up without violence and so that the children of the United States would not have to fight a new war springing up out of the ashes of this one a few years from now. That is why we are taking the steps now, through diplomacy and through strength, to see that Hanoi keeps the promises it made in Paris.

\* \* \*

We want to reduce the burden of arms that has weighed so heavily on the world for so long -- but we want that reduction to be mutual as a result of negotiation, not unilateral as a result of wishful thinking.

\* \* \*

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Let's never send the President of the United States to the conference table as head of the second strongest nation in the world.

\* \* \*

Admiral Nelson -- the great English hero -- died at the moment of his greatest triumph during the battle of Trafalgar. And his last words, as he fell to the deck of his ship, were these: "Thank God I have done my duty." Many of our comrades in arms did not live to see the peace for which they fought. But each member of this group can also say as he looks back on his service to the nation: "Thank God, I have done my duty."

# # #