National POW/MIA Recognition Day
September 18th, 2009   VA Chapel 1:00pm

You Are Not Forgotten

Tomah VA Medical Center
Approximately 21,000 former prisoners of war are still service members have been captured and imprisoned, since World War I, more than 142,000 American you.

Uncertainty due to the loss of loved ones whose thousands of military families tormented by

Served with dignity and honor under the worst of our behalf? America’s former prisoners of war are among our nation’s most revered heroes. They served with dignity and honor under the worst of human conditions – starvation, isolation, torture and the ever-present threat of death. And to the thousands of military families tormented by uncertainty due to the loss of loved ones whose whereabouts remain unknown, our hearts go out to you.

Since World War I, more than 142,000 American service members have been captured and imprisoned, more than 130,000 of them during World War II. Approximately 21,000 former prisoners of war are still alive.

The sheer number of Americans currently listed as missing in action – more than 78,000 from World War II, 8,140 from Korea, hundreds during the Cold War, and nearly 2,000 from Vietnam – is staggering. But America maintains its unwavering resolve to locate and identify its missing servicemen and women. Thus far in 2009, the remains of seven service members missing in action from the Korean War, three from World War II and one from the Vietnam War have been identified and returned. And just last month, the remains of a Navy pilot shot down in Iraq on the first night of Operation Desert Storm in 1991 who had been listed as “missing/captured” were identified and returned home.

Today is a solemn day - a day to pay tribute to the bravest of the brave. We are very honored to be able to fulfill one of the noblest missions of civil service. Thank you for attending today’s ceremony.

Jerald D. Molnar Medical Center Director

In the center of a bronze medallion one and three eighths inches in diameter, an eagle is shown with its wings displayed. Forming a circle around the eagle and following the contour of the medal, barbed wire and bayonet points may be seen. The eagle is the American bald eagle and represents the United States in general and the individual prisoner of war in particular. It is standing "with pride and dignity, continually on the alert for the opportunity to seize hold of beloved freedom."

The reverse has the inscription "AWARDED TO" around the top and "FOR HONORABLE SERVICE WHILE A PRISONER OF WAR" across the center in three lines with a space between the two inscriptions for engraving the name of the recipient. The shield of the Coat of Arms of the United States is centered on the lower part of the reverse side with the inscription "UNITED STATES OF AMERICA" around the bottom of the medal.

Ribbon

The ribbon to the Prisoner of War Medal is 1 3/8 inches wide and consists of a central band of black edged in white. The edge stripes of the ribbon are composed of pinstripes of red, white and blue (with the red forming the outer edge of the ribbon). The red, white and blue edge stripes represent the United States; the larger white stripes represent hope, and the black center stripe alludes to the bleakness of confinement as a prisoner of war.

The POW Medal is authorized by Public Law 99-145, section 1128, title 10, United States Code (10 USC 1128), 8 November 1985, and is authorized for any person who, while serving in any capacity with the U.S. Armed Forces, was taken prisoner and held captive after 5 April 1917.

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The POW Medal is to be issued only to those U.S. military personnel and other personnel granted creditable U.S. military service who were taken prisoner and held captive.

U.S. and foreign civilians who have been credited with U.S. military service which encompasses the period of captivity are also eligible for the medal. The Secretary of Defense authorized on January 27, 1990, the POW Medal for the Philippine Commonwealth Army and Recognized Guerrilla Unit Veterans who were held captive between December 7, 1941, and September 26, 1945. DD Form 2510-1 (Prisoner of War Medal Application/Information-Philippine commonwealth Army and Recognized Guerrilla Veteran). was developed as the application for Filipino Veterans who fit this category.

For purposes of this medal, past armed conflicts are defined as World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam Conflict, and Persian Gulf War. Hostages of terrorists and persons detained by governments with which the United States is not engaged actively in armed conflict are not eligible for the medal.

No more than one POW Medal will be awarded. For subsequent award of the medal, service stars will be awarded and worn on the suspension and service ribbon of the medal. A period of captivity terminates on return to U.S. military control. Escapes who do not return to U.S. military control and are recaptured by an enemy do not begin a new period of captivity for subsequent award of the POW Medal.

The POW Medal may be awarded posthumously.

The primary next of kin of eligible prisoners of war who die in captivity may be issued the POW Medal regardless of the length of stay in captivity.

Personnel officially classified as MIA are not eligible for award of the POW Medal. The POW Medal will only be awarded when the individual prisoner of war status has been officially confirmed and recognized as such by the Department of the Army. Likewise, the return of remains, in and of itself, does not constitute evidence of confirmed prisoner of war status.

All requests for the POW Medal will be initiated by eligible former POWs, or their next of kin, using a personal letter or DD form 251C.
Former Prisoners Of War

Former American prisoners of war (POWs) are eligible for special veterans benefits, including enrollment in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical care for treatment in VA hospitals and clinics without copayments as well as disability compensation for injuries and diseases that have been associated with internment. These benefits are in addition to regular veterans benefits and services to which they, as veterans, are entitled.

American Prisoners Of War at End of 2007

In 1971, Mrs. Michael Hoff, an MIA wife and member of the National League of Families, recognized the need for a symbol of our POW/MIAs. Prompted by an article in the Jacksonville, Florida Times-Union, Mrs. Hoff contacted Norman Rivkees, Vice President of Annin & Company which had made a banner for the newest member of the United Nations, the People's Republic of China, as a part of their policy to provide flags to all United Nations members states. Mrs. Hoff found Mr. Rivkees very sympathetic to the POW/MIA issue, and he, along with Annin's advertising agency, designed a flag to represent our missing men.

Following League approval, the flags were manufactured for distribution. On March 9, 1989, an official League flag, which flew over the White House on 1988 National POW/MIA Recognition Day, was installed in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda as a result of legislation passed overwhelmingly during the 100th Congress. In a demonstration of bipartisan Congressional support, the leadership of both Houses hosted the installation ceremony.

The League's POW/MIA flag is the only flag ever displayed in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda where it will stand as a powerful symbol of national commitment to America’s POW/MIAs until the fullest possible accounting has been achieved for U.S. personnel still missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

On August 10, 1990, the 101st Congress passed U.S. Public Law 101-355, which recognized the League’s POW/MIA flag and designated it “as the symbol of our Nation’s concern and commitment to resolving as fully as possible the fates of Americans still prisoner, missing and unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, thus ending the uncertainty for their families and the Nation”. The importance of the League’s POW/MIA flag lies in its continued visibility, a constant reminder of the plight of America’s POW/MIAs. Other than “Old Glory”, the League’s POW/MIA flag is the only flag ever to fly over the White House, having been displayed in this place of honor on National POW/MIA Recognition Day since 1982. With passage of Section 1082 of the 1998 Defense Authorization Act during the first term of the 105th Congress, the League’s POW/MIA flag will fly each year on Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day, National POW/MIA Recognition Day and Veterans Day on the grounds or in the public lobbies of major military installations as designated by the Secretary of the Defense, all Federal national cemeteries, the national Korean War Veterans Memorial, the National Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the White House, the United States Postal Service post offices and at the official offices of the Secretaries of State, Defense and Veteran’s Affairs, and Director of the Selective Service System.
Kevin Hermening was a 20-year-old Marine Corps guard stationed at the American Embassy in Tehran when a group of Iranian militants stormed the 27-acre compound Nov. 4, 1979. On that day, he earned a designation that changed his life: He was the youngest of 52 American hostages held captive in Iran for 444 exhausting days.

"Over the course of the entire 444 days, I was outside in the fresh air and sunshine for a whopping two hours," Hermening says. As a result, he now spends as much time as possible outdoors. "When you're denied that for 14 and a half months, it really becomes important."

During his captivity, Hermening was shuttled among residential buildings in the embassy compound, a maximum-security prison in downtown Tehran and an abandoned house in northeastern Iran. He spent most of his time sleeping, as much as 20 hours a day, in an attempt to escape the reality of his situation.

In early 1980 while at the abandoned house, he tried to escape. But those plans were thwarted when suspicious guards searched his room and discovered cash, a road map, telephone numbers and extra clothes he had stashed. He spent the following 43 days in solitary confinement.

Kevin Hermening celebrated his 21st birthday as a hostage in Iran two decades ago. "I have a much greater appreciation for freedom and our country," he says.

"The only thing in that room was a box spring with no mattress," he remembers. At first, he handled the isolation fairly well. "After all, I was a 20-year-old Marine. I was invincible," he says. "But after 40 days of wondering, 'Has the situation ended? Am I the last one here?' it started to wear on my mind, my soul and my body."

Unknown to Hermening at the time, the United States launched an unsuccessful attempt to rescue him and the other hostages on April 24, 1980. Nine American soldiers died during the attempt when their helicopters crashed in a blinding sandstorm.

"The American people can be assured that the Americans who were held hostage in Iran represented them well," Hermening says. "They stood up for what was right, and they didn't let anyone down."

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