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Director, US Vietnam War Commemoration

June 12, 2014

Ann [Mills-Griffiths], thank you for that kind introduction!

It is an honor to attend this Annual Meeting. I attended my first Annual Meeting of The National League of POW/MIA Families in, I believe, 1987, and I've attended many ever since. It is always a great privilege to be with you! Over the years, I have developed some very special friendships, and the list of special friends grows each year!

For those of you who attended the Twilight Tattoo yesterday, we hope you enjoyed the rainy performance! The Military District of Washington plans to dedicate one performance each year to Vietnam Veterans and their Families, especially those who lost loved ones. We will try to ensure it occurs in conjunction with your Annual Meeting, and we will work with MDW and Ann on this.

I've been asked to provide a brief update on the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration.

As you will recall, Congress passed a law authorizing DoD [Department of Defense] to organize, recruit, support, and facilitate programs all across America, to assist a Grateful Nation in thanking and honoring Vietnam Veterans and their Families...And, especially remember and honor the sacrifices of former Prisoners of War and the families who lost loved ones and those who have loved ones still missing-in-action and unaccounted for.

The Secretary of Defense hosted a ceremony on Memorial Day 2012 at The Vietnam Veterans Memorial. That kicked off this Commemoration.

The President and First Lady attended, along with the Vice President, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and almost the entire chain of command...But, the real VIPS were the Vietnam Veterans and their Families...Especially families who lost loved ones, and those who still have loved-ones missing-in-action and unaccounted for.

We requested families, who had names on “The Wall,” to lay the wreaths, and they were escorted by our most senior leaders. Your organization [The National League of POW/MIA Families] was represented by Ann and Mrs. Sara Frances Shay.

During the President's keynote address at the Ceremony, he spoke about those still missing-in-action and unaccounted for. And I quote: *And when an American does not come back -- including the 1,666 [now 1,642] Americans still missing from the Vietnam War -- let us resolve to do everything in our power to bring them home. This is our solemn promise.* End of quote.

Since our visit last year, the Commemoration has continued to expand! This program is very veteran and hometown centric. We have been recruiting towns, villages, and organizations to

join this effort all across this great Nation, to help remember, thank, and honor, our veterans, where they work and live.

When we spoke to you last year, 4,618 Commemorative Partners had joined the National Effort. In one year, this number has increased to more than 5,700! And that number increases daily, as you can see, it changed today from the number on the screen!

The Commemorative Flag is now flying or on display in more than 5,700 locations. When veterans and their families see this flag, they will know that their service and sacrifice is not forgotten.

We have asked our Commemorative Partners to help identify and present “Certificates of Honor,” signed by the Secretary of Defense and Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, to all family members who have loved ones still missing-in-action and unaccounted for, and to former POWs [Prisoners of War].

Through the efforts of our Commemorative Partners, a Grateful Nation has presented “Certificates of Honor” in ceremonies across the Nation!

- 182 Certificates of Honor have been presented to Missing-in-Action and Still Unaccounted for Family Members.
- 622 Certificates of Honor have been presented to In Memory of Family Members.
- And 207 Certificates of Honor have been presented to Vietnam Prisoners of War.

This could not have happened without your support! Thank you for that! I wish I had the time to tell you how much these certificates have meant to each recipient.

This afternoon, we have the privilege to present “Certificates of Honor” and Pins to additional family members. We will also be presenting Pins to family members who have already received their certificates. As most of you know, these certificates and pins go to Mothers, Fathers, Spouses, Children, and Siblings.

The National League of POW/MIA Families was one of our very first Commemorative Partners.

And as we close this update, we would like to formally recognize another Commemorative Partner that most of you in this room know very well...you see them each year working security and escorting guests.

We are honored to officially present the POW*MIA Elko Awareness Association with their Commemorative Partner Certificate and Flag! The commitment of the POW*MIA Elko Awareness Association demonstrates to all family members, that their sacrifice will never be forgotten, nor will their grief, be endured alone.

It is a privilege to present the Commemorative Partner Certificate and Flag to Mr. Les Brown. Ann, would you assist in making this presentation!

Mr. Brown, it is an honor to make this presentation on behalf of Secretary Hagel and General Dempsey! (Yvonne [Schilz] reads the certificate.)

Yvonne: We have another special presentation. Ann, if you would please remain with General Kicklighter. The Commemoration is proud to present the first lapel pin for our missing and unaccounted for families to Ann Mills-Griffiths. Ann and her staff were instrumental in the design. Ann, how can we ever properly thank you?