

SECDEF Hosts DSMC Professor as Keynote Speaker, National POW/MIA Recognition Day

Retired Air Force Col Norman McDaniel – “We Fight From Within, and We Return With Honor”

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In a Sept. 18, 1998, Pentagon ceremony hosted by Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, retired Air Force Col. Norman A. McDaniel, a professor at the Defense Systems Management College and former POW, was the keynote speaker for DoD's observance of National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Cohen's invitation to serve as keynote speaker was a singular honor for McDaniel, who represents but one of hundreds of POWs/MIAs from across the nation.

Returning With Honor

Welcoming the many veterans and former POWs attending the Pentagon ceremony, Cohen introduced McDaniel as “one of those who endured the trials and trauma as a prisoner-of-war during Vietnam.

“In 1966,” Cohen noted, “[then] Captain McDaniel's reconnaissance plane was shot down over North Vietnam. That began a period of six years of confinement, the ‘never-ending’ years as he later called them, in that unspeakable squalor of hellholes known as the ‘Hanoi Hilton’ and the ‘Zoo.’

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Cohen continued, “for over six years, his diet was mostly rice and swamp water. For six years, he endured isolation, interroga-

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SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM S. COHEN RE-VIEWS THE PROGRAM FOR NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY WITH KEYNOTE SPEAKER, RETIRED AIR FORCE COL. NORMAN A. MCDANIEL, A PROFESSOR AT THE DEFENSE SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT COLLEGE AND FORMER POW. THE CEREMONY WAS CONDUCTED AT THE PENTAGON ON SEPT. 18, 1998.



tions, and torture. But he and his fellow POWs had a motto: ‘We fight from within, and we return with honor.’”

Cohen went on to say that Captain McDaniel was one of only a handful of African-Americans held as a prisoner at the time. “The North Vietnamese tried to exploit examples of racism in our country to drive a wedge between Norman McDaniel and America. He refused. His captors had misjudged the courage of this man and the strength of the nation that produced him.”

After five years in captivity, at the depths of despair, McDaniel wrote these profound words that Secretary Cohen said, “still capture the full power of McDaniel's

quiet strength: ‘I'm still a man though I'm badly bent. I'll hope and strive until my life is spent.’”

Captain McDaniel, Cohen noted, “did indeed return with honor, and his story inspires us to this day.”

Fighting From Within

Norman McDaniel – husband, father, veteran, former POW, patriot, and devout Christian. All of those roles were embodied in his remarks as he spoke with sincerity and eloquence.

“It is a distinct honor to be your guest speaker for this very special occasion. All of us here today can be very thankful that we're fortunate enough to be alive

with hopes for tomorrow...to be free with the liberty to speak and move as we choose...and to be a part of such a great nation with its rich and cherished heritage.

"Millions of Americans who fought before us make us both proud and humble," he told those assembled on the Pentagon River Parade Field, as well as a nationwide audience watching the live broadcast. "Proud because those who have gone before us were loyal, dedicated, and faithful to the extent that they

well in peace and in war. Ordinary men and women doing extraordinary things to fulfill their military obligations and to maintain the freedom of our country and to keep it strong.

"From where," McDaniel questioned, "came the strength and the courage for *ordinary* men and women to do *extraordinary* things?"

He responded by saying that for him (and he believed for many others also), "that strength and courage comes from

Searching Deep Within

Said McDaniel, "I had to go far beyond just the comprehension of the code of conduct...I had to search deep, deep within myself to define what is worth dying for, what is worth living for, and what difference does or will it make? For me, I determined that I was committed to do my utmost, to remain true and faithful to my God, to my country, and to my fellow prisoners."

Of his torture and captivity, he said, "When the torture became so prolonged and so severe that I felt I had reached the limit of my endurance, it was a strong faith in God, dedicated allegiance to my country, a renewed determination to remain faithful and keep the faith with my fellow prisoners, and a life-sustaining love for my family that gave me the strength to endure and to survive."

McDaniel emphasized that he and his fellow American ex-POWs were very thankful "for the honor and recognition that you render us today." But he hastened to add that "this ceremony is for more than just my fellow ex-POWs and myself: this ceremony is also for the families of those who were killed in action and who are still missing in action — to give them the knowledge and the comfort that their loved ones are not forgotten.

"This ceremony is also for those who serve today," he continued, "and those who will serve in the future, to give them confidence that if they should be killed in action, missing in action, or prisoners of war, that they too, will not be forgotten."

Eternal Vigilance

Concluding, McDaniel spoke of sacrifice. Thomas Jefferson, he noted, one of the founders of this nation, spoke truth when he said: "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance." He urged those present and watching across the nation to "never forget the correct definition of, and proper respect for: Duty — Honor — Country...May God bless all of you, and may God Bless America."



RETIRED AIR FORCE COL. NORMAN A. MCDANIEL, A PROFESSOR AT THE DEFENSE SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT COLLEGE AND FORMER POW, DELIVERED THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE PENTAGON'S OBSERVANCE OF NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY, ON SEPT. 18, 1998.

sacrificed their time, talent, and some, even their very lives, to protect this nation and its vital interests. We're humbled because we realize that it is primarily a result of those who have gone before us, that we are able today to be blessed with the freedom and prosperity that we enjoy.

"Those of us who have gone in harm's way, engaged in combat, and have been held as prisoners of war," he emphasized, "truly appreciate the importance and the value of life, the preciousness of freedom, and how fortunate we are to be citizens of the United States of America.

"Throughout the history of our nation," McDaniel observed, "we find millions of men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces extremely

a strong faith in God. The God of whom the founders of this great nation depended. The courage and strength that come from those sources compel us and require us to cherish life, to do right, to serve others, and to honor our commitments."

McDaniel related that when he found himself a prisoner of war of the North Vietnamese — a very cruel enemy who refused to abide by the provisions of the 1949 Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War, "who treated me and my fellow prisoners worse than the worst of criminals, who subjected us to extremely brutal treatment under harsh and perilous conditions for more than six-and-one-half years" — he was compelled to go far behind just the knowledge of his oath.