Wings & Things Guest Lecture Series

Accounting for America's Missing Heroes

Former Air Force sergeant and co-author of the original story for the major motion picture, "Good Morning, Vietnam!" Adrian Cronauer discusses his work with the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office.

I have had an interesting last 20 years or so because of the obliquity of on that movie on late night television. My 20 minutes, or my 15 minutes, of fame has stretched on well beyond 20 years and I think it's starting to fade just a little bit because it happened a couple of weeks ago, I was going to have lunch with a friend who worked at one of the executive office buildings in Washington and I went in to the front entrance and walked up to the guard sitting at the desk and I said that I'm here to see Mr. so and so and said yes sir how do you spell your last name and I spelled it for him and he typed it in to the computer and looked to the screen and said, "Adrian," and I said, "Yes," and he said, "The Adrian Cronauer?" and I said, "Yes," and he said, "You mean from 'Dead Poets Society.'" Well, it could have been worse, he could have said "Mrs. Doubtfire" so but over these 20 years I've learned that there are certain things that people always want to know about and by far in a way the most often asked question is, how much of that movie is real. So before I start talking about the subject I came to talk about, I thought I'd answer that question for you and anybody you've all well many of you have been in the military and you know if I had done half the stuff that Robin Williams did in that movie, I'd still be in Leavenworth tonight instead of Ohio. There's a lot of Hollywood exaggeration and even outright imagination. To go through a quick list, let's see. Yes, I was a disc jockey in Vietnam. Anything else? Oh yes, I did teach English during my off duty time. No, I did not teach my class how to swear and use New York Street slang, and I was not teaching because I was trying to meet this particularly beautiful Vietnamese girl, at least not one particular beautifulVietnamese girl. I don't think I ever had any friends who were Vietcong, but then in the mid '60s, you did not go up to one of your Vietnamese acquaintances and say, Hey, you can tell me if you're really VC," so who knows. I don't think I ever had a sergeant major try and get me killed. I was not lost in the jungle trying to avoid the Vietcong. I was not in a Jeep that was hit by a landmine. I was not thrown out of Vietnam. I stayed for my full one year tour and was honorably discharged. There was no music censor for that ship. Nobody was forcing us to play polkas and Lawrence Welk all the time. On the other hand, there was news censorship. It was not the way it was shown in the movie. We did not have Frick and Frack, the Bobbsey Twins, sitting there with their little red pencils. It was all done by telephone with our headquarters organization, MACV Office of Information. MACV was where General Westmoreland had his office, and it wasn't all news stories that had to be cleared. Only two categories – one, anything involving Vietnam, whether it had to do with the military or not, two, anything involving the military whether it had to do with Vietnam or not. Either way, those stories never made it on the air.

I was in a restaurant shortly before the Vietcong hit it. It was not, as was shown in the movie, a place that was on the one of the streets in Saigon, rather it was in a boat that was moored in the Saigon River. I was called the My Canh Floating Restaurant, and they had tables and chairs set up on the deck of the boat and a nice breeze coming in off the river, and the food was halfway decent, so those of us who worked at the station would frequently go there for dinner. One night, we had eaten there -- about four of us -- and then we left the boat but were hanging out in the area when about 10 or 15 minutes later the Vietcong hit it with a Claymore mine. They didn't blow it up, but a Claymore mine, as many of you know, sends out a spray of shrapnel and it did a lot of damage but it also caused a lot of panic, and about two or three minutes later when everybody was frantically struggling to get a shore, they set of another charge aimed directly at the gangplank, and that's the one that did the real carnage. Well, as I said, we were hanging in the area. We heard the commotion and the sirens and ran to see what was going on. It became obvious very quickly that there wasn't too much we could do to be of help. Mostly we would get in the way, so we gathered what information we could and went back to the station, and we wrote up the story and called it in to the duty officer at MACV, and he said, "Oh no, we can't put that on the air," and I said, "Why not, sir?" and he said, "We have no official word that it's happened." I said, "Well, we were there; I saw it with my own eyes," and he said, "Yeah, but we don't know if anybody was hurt." I said, "Well, there was blood all over the place," and he said, "Well, we don't know if anybody was seriously injured." I said, "With due respect, sir, with my own eyes, I have seen heads severed from torsos. Now, barring the second coming, they're not gonna get up and go away." And we went around, and the final answer was no, and the final reason was well suppose we're wrong.

Now this is an example of what I call the bureaucratic factor. There are sometimes reasons why you can't put something on the air in a war zone. You think immediately of troop movements, but here we had a case where there was a junior officer on duty all by himself. He had to make a decision then and there, and he knew there were no brownie points for bravery if he let me put in on the air, but if something went wrong, it's his neck on the line, not mine, and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out in a situation like that, the safest course of action was, in the words of Nancy Reagan, "just say no" and that's what they did time and again.

Anything else? Oh, I was not thrown out of Vietnam, I stayed for full year tour. I think I've mentioned that. None of the characters in the film are based on actual people, for legal reasons like invasion of privacy and slander. On the other hand, as good as any stereotype as is true, you think of any character in the film and I could probably think of about half of dozen people I knew during my four years in the Air Force, and I suspect most of you could as well, but I've taken a lot of pride in "Good Morning, Vietnam" because of the number of Vietnam veterans who have told me it is the first film that began to show Americans in Vietnam as they really were instead of murderers and rapist and baby killers and dope addicts and psychotics. Well, I'm here to tell you, during my year in Vietnam, I went out into the field dozens of times, and I interviewed hundreds of Americans, and you know what? I never met a single murderer. I never met a single

rapist. I never met a single baby killer. I never met a single dope addict. I never met a psychotic. What I did meet were a lot of honorable men, and women too, who might not necessarily be that excited about where they found themselves but who were determined to do their duty as well and as professionally as they could, and that is the story that the media has not been telling, and I take some pride in the fact that my fellow veterans tell me that least began to be told in "Good Morning, Vietnam.

Well, the film has been a lot of help to me even though it wasn't necessarily accurate because Robin wasn't playing me. He wasn't playing Adrian Cronauer. He was playing a character name Adrian Cronauer, who shared a lot of my experiences in Vietnam, but in reality he was playing Robin Williams. He always does, and people say what is Robin Williams really like. My answer is I don't know because he's always on. You walk up to him and say hello, and he starts doing a routine for you. Now I'm a lawyer not a shrink so what do I know but it is my layman's analysis that he's really a very shy, bashful, introverted person, and he does all of these routines and imitations and schticks to build a wall around himself so you can never get through to hurt the real Robin, and the only time I've ever seen him let that down was when he was playing with his own little kids because they are no threat to him, unconditional love from the kids.

But the notoriety from "Good Morning, Vietnam" has allowed me to do a lot of things that I feel are important. For example, I've been a two term trustee of the Virginia War Memorial. I spent a term on the Virginia Public Radio Board, and I spent several terms on the Arlington Virginia Cable Advisory Committee. I've also been on the board of the National Vietnam and Gulf War Veteran's Coalition, and I've been on the National Board of an organization called the Citizens Flag Alliance which is a coalition of a number, about a 120 different organizations, philanthropic, fraternal, civic organizations, religious. All of which have banded together to try and pass a constitutional amendment that will allow us to protect the American flag from being burned and spit upon and otherwise physically mutilated. We haven't done it yet, but we're going to keep trying because it's so close. Every time it comes up, it goes through the House of Representatives, swimmingly, but then it comes to the Senate and because the requirement for constitutional amendments to have a super majority, we always miss it by about two or three votes, but we're gonna keep trying, and I feel it's important that I work on this.

Another thing is, and a lot of people are very surprised to hear it, because when they think of me, they think of Robin Williams, but I've been a life long card-carrying republican and when I was involved in Republican politics, I was a national coach chairman of Veterans for Dole and then in the next selection I was a vice chairman of Republicans for Bush, and when the new Bush administration came in in 2001 they asked me if I would be interested in joining them, and I said "Doing what?" and we talked about a number of different things including working at the FCC and also working on the prisoner of war missing in action issue. I wasn't too sure I wanted to do that until the night of 9/11, and I'd spent the day watching the live feeds and the tape playbacks, and that night I was sitting with the TV going and I was talking with my wife and I said, "You know, Jean, if I were about 30 years younger, I might go back in the military." She

said, “Adrian, has it occurred to you that if take that job they’re talking about at the Pentagon, you might be able to make even more of a contribution than you ever could in uniform.”

Well, I thought about it and as often happens, I decided my wife was right, so since September of 2011, I have been a special assistant to the director of the prisoner of war missing in action office at the Department of Defense, and it’s been a very interesting job. At times, like any job, it can be troublesome or frustrating or difficult, but all in all it is some of the most rewarding work I’ve ever done. I’ll throw some quick statistics to you, but I have found that regardless of who I talk to, after I’m through, even when it’s active duty military, people will say, “My Lord, I had no idea we were doing all this,” and I hope after I’m through this evening, you’ll say the same thing. In fact, I was in the Midwest about a year ago and at veteran’s reunion and one of the members of the Color Guard was the commander of the local VAA chapter. He came up to me afterwards and he said, “You know, I’m very glad I came this evening because I’ve been going around making speeches saying that the government isn’t doing anything on this issue. Now I’m going to have to change my speeches totally.” Well, the government is indeed doing a lot on this issue, but there’s a lot to do.

We have 88,000 people who are still missing and unaccounted for. 78,000 of those are from World War II. About 8,100 are from the Korean War. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 1,800 from the Vietnam War. A little more than a 120 from the Cold War. One from the first Gulf War in 1991, and I believe right now, it’s three from the current war in the Middle East. In order to account for all of these, we know we will never get complete and total 100% full accounting because for example, among the World War II ones especially, so many ships sank at sea and so many planes ditched in the ocean, but our goal is the fullest possible accounting, and right now we manage to account for -- it’s hard to strike average but roughly about 100 cases we close every year, and so that works out to something like two a week. To do this job, we have over 100 people in Washington and more than 500 others throughout the world who are working in various units full time on accounting for missing Americans.

Some of them are, I’d say, probably about 40% or 45% active duty military. The rest are retired military or veterans or others who have some connection with the military. I think that I’ve never work with finer group of people. They are by and large a fine group of highly intelligent, highly dedicated, highly educated, highly motivated people who do this work even though they probably, in my opinion, could be doing a lot better economically in the private sector. They do it because they believe in it. They know how important it is and I think also in the back of their mind somewhere there’s the thought that there but for the grace of God, could have been me, and I’ve had that thought myself. In Washington I said we have over 100 people. Our office was set up in 1993.

Before that well, before Vietnam, in Korea and World War II and World War I and on and on, the general policy was that if you fight overseas and die overseas, you were buried overseas, and your family got a telegram, and they hung a gold star in the window and went on about life. But with Vietnam, there was a difference because it used to take -

- to get to a foreign country where we're fighting -- it used to take a long sea voyage of three or four months or more. With Vietnam, it was the first war that was fought in the age of the jet transport passenger vehicle, and it was possible to be on the tarmac at Tan Son Nhut Air Base outside of Saigon, and in less than 24 hours, to be on the streets of San Francisco. So now it became possible to return remains to the families. So you got Mrs. Jones sitting at home, and she gets a telegram from the Department of Defense, and it says we regret to inform you that your son Johnny Jones perished in Vietnam. Well, she cries a bit and thinks about this and she says now wait a minute, a couple of blocks over Mrs. Smith her son Sammy, he died in Vietnam and they returned his remains to her. Where is my son Johnny? Well, Mrs. Jones got together with some other parents of those who had perished in Vietnam and they got together with other parents and they got together with other ones and pretty soon, you had a political movement going and they started writing their congressmen and wanting to know why they couldn't find out anything about the fate of their missing love ones.

So since there was no precedent for this kind of thing before, every little department in Washington had it's own little act that they were playing and you had the DIA and the Mortuary Affairs and the casualty offices and graves registration and on and on and they were all working without any coordination with the other so some of their efforts were duplicative, some were counterproductive, and after a Senate hearing or House hearing or Congressional hearing, one or the other, or two, in 1993 our office was set up to try and bring an overall policy, unanimity to our governments efforts. Well, at first and even somewhat today, it was like trying to heard cats on wet linoleum, and even today it's a little like that, but we do it because it is important, and our office has policy jurisdiction to set it and enforce it over all of these other groups, and I thought I'd tell you a little bit about these groups this evening.

The first started out as JTF, or well I guess it started off, I forget what they call it originally but it became JTFFA, Joint Task Force for Full Accounting. The military, as you know, loves acronyms, and I had a terrible time trying to remember all the acronyms, and it was even worse because not only that I have to learn new ones, I had to relearn old ones and unlearn them. For example, all of my life having been in broadcasting and advertising, PR meant public relations. Now it means personnel recovery. SOF meant sound on film. Now, it means special operations forces. So I have to learn all these new acronyms and sometimes I was able to remember the acronym even though I couldn't remember what it stood for. For example, JTFFA, I couldn't always remember what it stood for. I remembered the acronym because I'd think just try to find the freaking Americans. Well, JTFFA is the organization that sends out the Ph.D.-level archeologists to go out and find the remains and retrieve them, and when we first started this activity, some of the other countries, the Koreans, the Vietnamese would come to us and hand us a box full of bones and we kept saying no, no that's not what we want. We don't want just dead bones, we want identifiable remains and to a large extent, after many, many years of pounding our head against that brick wall, we're finally getting it through to them because we want to go in and do the excavation ourselves because the way we just find the body for example tells us a lot or even where the body is located because let's say in Vietnam, you have 1,800 people, a universe of that many possibilities and you want to

shrink them down. So where the remains are found is important because only certain Americans were in that area so your universe of possibility shrinks down. Then the way the body is buried, that tells you a lot. For example, in Korea, if you find a body, a very shallow grave and the body is thrown in there upside down and all golly-wampus, you know that that was probably a burial by the enemy. They were coming down like a bat out of Hades, and they ran in to some bodies and they threw them in the ditch and maybe if they were lucky covered them up, but if the body is in a deep grave, it's laid out, face up, reverently treated with arms crossed, then you know that it was, in all probability, placed there by that man's own comrades, and that kind of information helps again to narrow down the possibilities. Something you may find in the grave with them will help, circumstantial evidence like a sweater or a button, even just a button from a sweater, or the partial sole of a boot. For example, if a person was wearing a sweater; you know it was chilly weather. There go the possibilities, smaller and smaller, and once they get all the remains and all of the circumstantial evidence that were buried with it or that were found at the crash site or the burial site then they bring those remains back to Hawaii to the Central Identification Laboratory, CILHI, and there they have Ph.D.-level archeologists, pardon me, anthropologists, and the anthropologists are able to take the remains and lay them out on a large table, and maybe there's only half a dozen or dozen pieces of bone but they look at them and they study them and put them under a microscope and do some chemical analysis and whatever, and finally they'll say well this individual was a Caucasian male, about 27 to 30 years old, weighed approximately 140 to 145 pounds, 5'9" in height, and when he was a teenager, he broke his left arm. There comes the possibility way down, and then they also will consult with people at the Life Science Equipment Laboratory in San Antonio, Texas, at what used to be Brooks Air Force Base and is now Brooks City Base – oh, before I get into that, let me stay with CILHI for just a minute. They have a lot of techniques they use for analyzing things. For example, and we are not just talking about the wars that I mentioned. I was there about three years ago and they had two sets of fully articulated skeletal remains that they had retrieved from the Monitor. Remember the old Civil War ship that had sunk off the Carolinas, and when they pulled it up on the mud, they found these two sets of skeletal remains in the turret. They took them in to CILHI, and the bones were about as bright red as these seats here because the iron from the armor plating had leeched into the bones, but what they've been able to do so far. I think it's pretty clever. What they did was they have a technique, a non-invasive technique, they can use lasers to determine the chemical composition of the teeth. Now if you think about it, your teeth are all formed with the exception of your wisdom teeth before you hit puberty so the chemical composition of your teeth can tell a lot about the diet you had as a child and these two sets of skeletons, both they have determined, had a diet that indicated that as children they grew up somewhere in Northern Europe. So it's amazing the kind of information they can get.

I started to tell you about LSIL the Life Science Equipment Laboratory in Brooks City Base down in Texas at San Antonio, and there they have in their artifacts division, people who are experts on life support equipment, flight suits, helmets, ejection seats, and they have one of the largest collections of those anywhere in the world, and that organization is being BRAC'd and I understand they're coming here to Wright-Patt, and I suspect the

museum will have quite a lot to say with them over their collection and access to it. But they are able to take something that looks like this rusty mud-encrusted hunk of something, and they'll study it and look at it and twist it and turn it and turn it around and maybe put it under the microscope and finally they'll say well this, this is a buckle off of a parachute harness, model number such and such, and that model was only used in Southeast Asia and only between 1971 and '73 and oh by the way, they go over to a shelf, this is what it look like brand new. Son of a gun, they're right. There goes the possibilities down a lot smaller. And once they get the possibilities down to a very small amount, then they can do DNA analysis. For the past 10 or 15 years, I guess it's been about 15 years now, when anybody has been on active duty, they've had to give a blood sample and from that sample, two drops are put on a piece of blotting paper about the size of a postcard, and those drops, each one of them expands out to a stain about a size of a quarter. The identification information is written on the card. It's vacuum sealed in foil and kept in a gigantic three-story refrigerator at minus 30 degrees. They are approaching 5,000,000 reference samples of these, and so all they have to do is come in and say here is a DNA profile of some remains we have. We think its Johnny Jones. They go pull Johnny Jones' card, open the sealed foil packet, take an ordinary paper punch and go to one of those stains go ca-ching and the little tiny dot of blood-stained blotting paper is enough to be able to give them a full complete DNA sample.

Now back in 1991 -- a lot of people work on this issue besides us and we weren't even in existence at that time -- but there was a veteran, an activist by the name of Ted Sampley down in North Carolina, and he had gathered a lot of information about who he thought was the unknown soldier from Vietnam and he went to the family and laid out his case and they thought they were pretty persuaded about it and they went to the military, to the Pentagon and they resurrected the remains from the Tomb of the Unknown soldier from Vietnam and did the DNA analysis and Sampley was right. So they determined that the unknown soldier was in fact an Air Force pilot by the name of Lieutenant Michael Blassie, and his remains were returned to his family and now buried outside of St. Louis while the tomb of the unknown soldier from Vietnam is empty. Now this is not official government policy. This is Adrian Cronauer's own personal opinion on this, but I don't believe there will ever be another unknown soldier because of the DNA analysis that's being done. The other scientific advances are being made and it's amazing what they can do. For example, in one case, there was someone missing. They tried to do a DNA profile and they found, in doing the genealogical research, that he had been adopted and they didn't know where his biological parents were, so there was no possibility of getting a reference sample. What they did was take a DNA profile from his two children, then subtracted all of the DNA information from his wife and what was left was the father.

So it's amazing the kind of detective work they are doing on DNA. However, DNA is not the kind of thing that you go to first, you go through all the other means possible first because it costs you about a thousand dollars or so to do a DNA profile, and so just the cost of doing all of that on 5,000,000 samples would break the federal government. Well, no, nothing is gonna break the federal government but nonetheless it would be very expensive. So what they do is they – well, first of all I should say there are two kinds of DNA, there's nuclear DNA and as the name would implied it's the kind of DNA that you

find in the nucleus of your cells, and that is a random combination of your father's and mother's, and because it is a random combination, it is unique to you as an individual. Unless you're an identical twin, nobody else in the world has that same kind of nuclear DNA. However, nuclear DNA is very unstable. It can be destroyed by time or light or heat or radiation or chemicals or a lot of other things, and so getting a good DNA sample especially over time is very difficult if not impossible. Fortunately though, there was something else we can use. In each cell, outside of the nucleus, there are hundreds of little organelles called mitochondria. There the thingamibobs that process energy for the cell, and because of the way the father and mother cells combine, only the father's nuclear information is retained. The rest of the mitochondria are all inherited from your mother. Therefore, your mitochondrial DNA is the same as your mother's and when you think about it that would mean, it is also as the same as any of your brothers or sisters, or any of your mother's siblings, or her mother and her siblings, so it is possible for us to go up the genealogical tree, go out on a limb and down another branch and find somebody who has that same mitochondrial DNA and use that as a reference sample.

That's for example how they determined that it was at least possible that Thomas Jefferson was the father of Lucy Hemmings' children. What they'd really determined, in spite of what you may read otherwise, is that her children where fathered by a Jefferson but not necessarily Thomas Jefferson. It could have been another male in the Jefferson family because mitochondrial DNA is not specific to one individual. So we can go to the DNA laboratory, and we can say here's a reference sample from a set of remains we have. We think it's Johnny Jones. They can pull the DNA card and do an analysis on Johnny Jones. From that they can tell us one of two things, either it could be Johnny Jones or it could not, and the negative information is just as important, sometimes more important, than the positive identification.

Now if we have … sometimes we don't get it down to one person, sometimes we have two or three or more. So we can go to them and say well you think this is either Jones or Smith or Woljokowsky. They could say yes, it could be Jones, but it couldn't be Smith or Woljokowsky, or they can say yes, it could be Smith or Jones but not Woljokowsky or they say it could be all three of them, or they can say it can't be any of them or also they could say we just don't have enough information, but that doesn't happen that often, but it could be. So once we get all of the information we can and narrow down the possibility, we use DNA just to confirm what we already believe, and one of the problems is that we don't have any DNA blood samples from anybody whose been in the military and left it more than 15 years ago, so people from Korea, from Vietnam, the Cold War, we don't have it. So what we have to do is find their relatives and get a DNA sample from them. That's a very simple process, just take a swab and get a little swab from the inside of the cheek. That's all it takes, painless. I've had it done. Once they have that, then they can proceed with the DNA's analysis.

Now people say where do you find, how do you find these grave sites, these crash sites? Well, there are all kinds of ways we do it. One way is we look at all kinds of records, morning reports and other documents that are part of a person's military record. We go to veterans' reunions, and we ask them questions. What unit did you served with?

Where were you stationed? When? Do you know what happened to any of your comrades? And we don't do that just with our own veterans, we do it with veterans or organizations or countries rather that were our enemies so we go to the Vietnamese and speak to, talk to their veterans or the people from World War II, we talked to them as well or Korea. Where were you stationed? Did you shoot down any American planes? Do you know what happened to the pilot? Did he eject? Did he land safely? If so, do you know what happened to him then? If he died, do you know where he was buried? Can you show us the grave? In fact, we have six people at our embassy in Moscow who are permanent party there who do two different things. One, they do these oral histories as we call them. They go out and they talk to not just veterans of the Russian army but veterans of the old Soviet Union, Lithuanian, Hungary and Latvians so forth. Again, asking those same kinds of questions, and then the other part of their time, they are in the Soviet archives trying to find documents that will lead us to the fate of a missing American, and about a year or two ago, we got a report from one of the classified, or declassified now, Soviet documents that led us to the crash site of an American pilot during the Korean War. He had been flying over North Korea along the Yalu River, which is the border between North Korea and China. His plane was hit. He lost control and it drifted over the boarder into China where it crashed and the location of the crash site, we found through one of these documents in the Soviet archives, and because of that we were able to go to the Chinese government and they let us get in and retrieve the remains and return them to his family. I say they let us get in because we are dealing, and a lot of times some people, some of our veterans will say, "Well, why don't we just go in and get them, get the remains," and we say "Well, these are sovereign nations and we can't just go marching in. We have to negotiate with them of where we're going and what we're going to do."

With every country it's a different story. The Cambodians are great. We say we want to go, well sure, you can go there, what do you want to do, sure that's fine. We sometimes joke that they're saying yes before we even ask the questions.

The Vietnamese are not quite as cooperative, they're reasonably cooperative, but there are places in the central highlands where we still haven't been able to go in. They say because it has a lot of political unrest in those areas, and they don't want us to go in there. We also want to get in to their archives and look at their documents, but if you think about it, if a Vietnamese communist came to this country and say that they like to go through our still classified files at the CIA or the DIA or whatever, DOD, we wouldn't say no, we'd say hell no, and so we are working on plans whereby we can get one of their intelligence people who is retired but still has the proper clearances to be able to go in and look at their own archives. We brief him on what we're looking for. If he finds anything, he comes out and tells us. So we're figuring out all these kinds of work arounds.

The Laos are much more difficult to deal with. You've got to tell them what you plan to do, where you're gonna go, start at the North, go South, don't ever deviate from the plan. Then we have to deal with the North Koreans. I have participated in negotiations with the North Koreans, and I can tell you from personal knowledge, they are frustrating,

infuriating, illogical, irrational, and those are their good points, but we do this because it is important. It's important to the people we are representing, the missing themselves, which we say are our number one constituency, but in reality it's the families that we are interested in dealing with, and also we have a third constituency, and those are the people who are going, who wear the uniform today and are going to be going into harm's way. We want them to know that their government is never going to abandon them.

Actually, there are three parts to our mission and I've been talking about retrieving and identifying remains and returning to the family and that is a significant part of what we do, but there's also two other things we do. Number one, we want to make sure that nobody goes missing if we can help it today, and so we make sure that the troops going into harm's way are properly trained in things like SERE training, survival and evasion, resistance and escape. We want to make sure they have the training in the code of conduct. We want to make sure that they have the proper equipment, the two-way locator beacon and state-of-the-art two-way radios. We want to make sure that the people will go out looking for them are properly trained and have the best equipment they can, and this is even more important when you have a multi-service search like the Air Force and Navy both going to look for the same person. We want to make sure that they're both working from the same playbook so they don't become counterproductive or duplicative, and this becomes even more important when it's a multinational search, say the Americans and the Brits or the Aussies searching for the same person.

And then we want to every time, we want to ensure that Americans are not being kept anywhere in the world as captives. So every time we get a report of an American suspected of being held captive somewhere, we always if it's a credible report, follow it as far as it goes. I say if it's a credible report. Sometimes we get very strange reports about flying saucers or something, but if it's a credible report, we always follow it up as far as it takes us. Unfortunately, or fortunately as case might be, I have to report you that since the mid '70s, there has only been one case that has actually led to a live American, and that was Jessica Lynch if you remember the young female driver, Army soldier, who was captured in Iraq, and through an informant, we found out where she was being held and what hospital and raided it and rescued her. That is, however, the only case since the mid '70s that has actually led to a live American. The rest of all been dry holes, wild goose chases, whatever metaphor you choose, but nonetheless, we always follow up because unless we have positive proof that somebody is dead, we always must assume that they may be alive. It is the only moral thing we can do. Plus, I would, on a personal basis, and other people, most of my colleagues share the same opinion, I would hate to be sitting in a foreign jail cell somewhere and think that my government had forgotten about me, so we always follow up.

Now one of the most rewarding parts of my job is what we call family updates. Once a month or so, well in the summer, we will invite family members to Washington to come in. We will spend several days giving them briefings from various Pentagon officials and people from our various units around the world, but other times of the year, once a month we will pick a major metropolitan area. Last month it was Salt Lake City. We rent a hotel ballroom on a Saturday. We invite anybody from about a 350-mile radius who

happens to be related to somebody who is still missing from any of our conflicts. We invite them to come in and spend the day with us. Then we bring in representatives of our various units that I've been talking about. We bring them in and then spend the day giving them a PowerPoint briefing about what we do, how we do it, why and so forth. At the end of the day, we give them a print out of whatever information we might have about their own particular missing loved one. Then we give them a chance to sit down with the area expert, like if they're missing from say Vietnam, we let them talk to a Southeast Asia analyst. And for some of this family members, this is the first time in years, maybe even decades, that they have heard anything about their own missing love one, and even for only able to give them a tiny bit of new information, it means so much to them. They are so grateful, and it gets kind of emotional at times and we see how much it means to the family members, and so we get recharged and revitalized and rededicated because we understand what it means to them.

I think back to when I went through Air Force basic training down at Lackland Air Force Base back in … and they said in one of the classes, the sergeant who was conducting it said, you are now members of the United States Air Force and you should know that the military takes care of its own. Should you ever find yourself isolated behind the enemy lines, know that we will do everything humanly possible to find you and rescue you before the enemy gets to you to capture you, but if you are captured, then know that we will move heaven and earth to get you released and returned to us. And if, God forbid, you should perish in enemy hands, we will never cease in our efforts to find your remains and return them to your love ones for an honorable hero's burial in American soil. That is a promise that your government makes to you. It is a promise. If you come to our office in Arlington, Virginia, in Crystal City, you will enter to through two large plate glass doors, and on the left hand one as you enter, there's a large color depiction of our organization's logo. It shows a burning torch, below the torch is a ribbon, and on the ribbon is written the motto of our office, "Keeping the promise." That's what we do. Day after day, week after week, year after year, we are trying to keep the promise.