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Congressional Record S. 9382 - Speech on Commemoration of Loss and Suffering of the Dead and Wounded Members of the Armed Forces Occasioned by the War in Vietnam

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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CONGRESSIONAL RECORD — SENATE
May 21, 1973

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE LOSS AND SUFFERING OF THE DEAD AND WOUNDED MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES OCCASIONED BY THE WAR IN VIETNAM

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, on behalf of the distinguished minority leader and myself, with Memorial Day just around the corner, I send to the desk a Senate resolution and ask for its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. NUNN). The resolution will be stated by title.

The assistant legislative clerk reads as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 117) commemorating the war in Viet-nam and honoring the men who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty; and for other purposes. Noted.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the present consideration of the resolution?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, this week the Senate approaches its Memorial Day recess, a time when the Senate adjourns to join the Nation in honoring those who have made personal sacrifice for their Nation in time of war. In preparing for this occasion this year, the Senate has gone on record to single out specifically for special tribute those missing in action as a result of the war in Viet-nam. I speak of the dead and the wounded, and it is in their behalf and to honor them that the distinguished minority leader and I rise today to present the resolution now before the Senate.

The war in Vietnam may be over and the prisoners may be coming home, however, are the 56,244 American GI's who were killed in this tragedy. And coming home broken both in body and in spirit are many of the 203,635 American GI's whose wounds left them torn and maimed, at times legless or armless or sightless, surviving only as living testaments to the waste and tragedy of this war in Viet-nam. Their numbers alone contain 25,000 paraplegics and quadriplegics. Countless more are bedridden, mangled, confined to wheelchairs and otherwise left with scars that mean imprisonment for a lifetime.

And what about those 56,244 who returned to America in the last casualty list, dated January 27, 1973, and extending from January 1, 1961, as well as an article published in yesterday's Washington Star, entitled "Notes of a POW—Doing a Life Term."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NUMBER OF CASUALITIES INCURRED BY U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL IN CONNECTION WITH THE CONFLICT IN VIETNAM, ACCUMULATIVE FROM JAN. 1, 1961 THROUGH JAN. 27, 1973

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Army</th>
<th>Navy</th>
<th>Marine Corps</th>
<th>Air Force</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casualties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wounded or injured</td>
<td>25,373</td>
<td>1,092</td>
<td>11,478</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>38,438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatally wounded</td>
<td>3,516</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>1,491</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>5,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital cared required</td>
<td>9,602</td>
<td>4,178</td>
<td>13,263</td>
<td>921</td>
<td>30,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing in action</td>
<td>104,718</td>
<td>5,898</td>
<td>37,202</td>
<td>3,514</td>
<td>150,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casualties not the result of actions by hostile forces</td>
<td>2,514</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>12,937</td>
<td>931</td>
<td>18,528</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deaths:

- From aircraft accidents/ incidents:
  - Fixed wing: 90
  - Helicopter: 2,389
  - Ground: 28,114
  - Total deaths: 31,593

- Civilians: 1,103
  - Total civilian deaths: 1,118

Lying there, I guess I became religious all of a sudden. I was making these vows, thinking, "God, if you'll make me live, I'll do this or I'll do that."

Chicago—Of all the shots fired in a battle, one sound different from the rest and you know, instinctively, that bullet has your name on it.

I know this because I was a U.S. Army medic in Vietnam. I heard it over and over from the guys I patched up on the battlefield.

And I know because I definitely heard the bullet that got me. Riffles and machine guns were blazing all around, and one crack was more distinct than any other. It was for me.

I had been in Vietnam six months. The life expectancy of a medic was only three or four months.

My number came up on July 19, 1966, two days before I was scheduled to leave Vietnam for the States. We were in a reaction- ary platoon, intended to back up another group on a search-and-destroy mission.

We were waiting when suddenly the radio man from the other platoon screamed over the horn, "My God, there are Viet Cong all over the place." Then we went into the main battle in choppers. We landed in a mine field. We lost complete ships carrying men. It was complete chaos.

I was moving cautiously from body to body, carrying my aid bag, looking for a few who weren’t beyond help.

I was on one side of a dirt bank in a rice paddy, and the first sergeant yelled to me to get a man lying on the other side. I told myself I would count to three and jump over, and I did. One, two, Three. Crack! I went down, I had to get that one.

When I fell to the other side, I was paralyzed. Already, my body was drawn up, twist ed, and the blood given my lips and my tongue hurt. My eyebrows hurt. It was just one tremendous charliehorse.

The first thing then was to give me, and I re member him shaking me and screaming, "Doc, Doc, you okay?" Then he turned, and I will never forget the words, "Oh, my God, Doc's dead."

I wasn’t dead. I wasn’t. I kept thinking, "I’m alive, save me!" But I couldn’t talk or move and the sergeant moved on to someone else. I never saw him again.

Lying there, I guess I became religious all of a sudden. I was making these vows, thinking, "God, if you’ll make me live, I’ll do this or I’ll do that."

Charlie—that’s what the GI’s called the Viet Cong—came over and took my 40, my aid bag and some other equipment. He kicked me in the left hand to see if I was alive. God, what was pounding in my brain I knew he would hear it. But he didn’t.

I couldn’t see what was happening around me. I heard the aid man saying to get me help from others in my platoon, and I heard him.

Then all was still. The man who saved me was named Grayson, a black man from Ohio who, a little earlier, had been my very first patient in
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Although he was badly hurt, he managed to drag me about 80 feet to a bush area. I don't know how long I lay there, but we did. Grayson was making whistles, I'm a Mexican-American and I broke up when they found me, black guy says, "Lookit, all the guys, why do I gotta die with you--a member of a minority.

Off in the distance, we could see a chopper, just a speck in the sky. But we didn't know what a great psychological bond between us. We knew that they were the only ones who could bend over either, and he repeated almost the same thing when the chopper flew over. We could see a speck in the distance, we could see a chopper, just a speck in the sky.

A lieutenant colonel came in our room right after we got there to present us with the Purple Heart. That's probably was his main job. He had dark glasses, just like Gen. MacArthur's, and a cigarette holder were our friends, I didn't think he could ever bend over, and the nurses were around him like bees on honey.

He gave us a little talk about how we had been wounded just a little more than three months earlier. "Well, it's impossible for you to walk," he said. "What do you mean?" I demanded. "You can see I am wearing a cast on my right leg," I said. "Young injuries," he informed me, "never walk so soon.

I walked back to my room, took off the leg brace and stood the crutches up in the corner and went back to physical therapy in my wheelchair. That seemed to please the doctor very much.

One night not long after that, we were having dinner in the ward. I knew that's childish, but that's what we did, anyway. I let one guy have it with a pillow and, in the process, threw my right shoulder out of joint.

But I didn't get to see a doctor until almost an hour later. Since I had thrown my shoulder out of joint, the doctor didn't seem to know. I tried to explain it to him. "Use the simple fulcrum method," I said. "Don't tell me what to do," he snapped. "I'm the doctor.

Well, he tucked and pushed awhile, and when it became obvious that he wasn't accomplishing anything, he got me on a litter and took me to the emergency section.

They called the orthopedic doctor on duty. He took one look and used the simple fulcrum method, just like I had told the doctor on the ward to do in the first place.

On another occasion, I had an upset stomach, but I had to report for physical therapy, common among paraplegics. "Nurse," I said, "I think I'm going to have diarrhea." She asked if I could have Lomotil, an antidiarrheal drug. She said, "Don't forget to give me the patient medication without the doctor's orders. Look," I said, "I do have to get diarrhea before I can go to the bathroom.

"That's about the way it is," she said, and she wouldn't ask the doctor.

Well, I got the Lomotil, of course, and then the nurse gave me Kapectate, a awful-tasting creamy liquid that cures diarrhea for some people. I protested that Kapectate never worked for me, but the nurse said she would wait and see how the program was going at Walter Reed was fantastic. They made you do things for yourself, for instance, I had to wash myself from the start. The first day, I held a bowl of corn flakes with my chin on my chest and spilled most of it on my neck. But I got better at eating corn flakes as time went on.

By the end of the first week, I could operate a walker and then I went on physical therapy for as long as I could take it, up to eight hours some days. By the end of my two months stay, I could walk with leg braces and crutches.

Then I was discharged from the Army, with a monthly allowance treatment at Walter Reed but qualified me for veteran's benefits. I left Walter Reed on October 16, 1966, to come to the Hines VA Hospital near Chicago, my hometown.

It was another world. Two days after I arrived at Hines, I had my first physical therapy appointment and I was looking forward to it because of the progress I had been making. That morning, I put my braces and my pants on and walked on crutches down to the physical therapy room.

The doctor took one look at me and said, "I thought you were a young (recent) invalid." I was surprised to hear that I had been wounded just a little more than three months earlier.

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It together about an hour and a half to figure out that I was right. Then the doctor agreed I could have Lomotil.

I suppose what I object to is always being called as a "private citizen," a patient. There is a doctor, a patient. Never Pete Rice. You are in a wheelchair, so you sit there and permit people to go by you. You are 30 years old, and you've had more than your share of experiences, but you are treated as if you were a minor.

For instance, an aide brings you a menu before meals. The menu has no purpose. It is supposed to look like it is on the menu. But you get it anyway. "This is good for you," the nurse says.

A monthly check from the government because of your disability. You are legally entitled to the money and don't owe an accounting to anyone. But that doesn't stop a social worker from coming around to ask you how you spent it.

Since you are "a patient" and expected not to think, you should not ask questions about your own body. You don't need to know why your bowels won't work, why you can't have sexual relations, why you are spastic, why you have cold feet higher than the other one.

Oh, we have had classes and a nurse puts an anatomical chart on the wall. "This is where you are injured." In sum, you are to accept pain because you are supposed to have pain.

When I came to Hines, it seemed that people who can't get jobs digging holes on the outside, the quadriplegic can't get on the outside, the quadriplegic can't get another phone, the portable one is the only means of communication that the quadriplegic has with the outside.

The employees aren't supposed to use the portable phone. All they have to do is walk about 30 feet out into the hall to use another phone. But Badasa continued, made friends with the nurses, and he tied it up for 15 to 20 minutes at a time.

One night, a good friend of mine, Jam Imperiale, who is a paraplegic, had the phone beside his bed and received a couple of calls for Badasa. But he wouldn't talk, and he said they should call back on the staff phone.

And one of them did, apparently telling Badasa what Imperiale had said. Imperiale had just gotten into his wheelchair when Badasa came in and literally yanked him out of the chair and hit him in the back.

Imperiale complained to the nurse, who was afraid to do anything about it. But Badasa threatened to kill Imperiale if he ever caught him outside the hospital.

That weekend, Imperiale had planned to leave the hospital. But when he got to the front door, he saw Badasa and three other guys sitting in a car. One of them raised up the window, and Badasa turned to him, all right. He didn't leave that weekend and, in fact, never left again until he was discharged.

One of the unfortunate things about the wonderful personality of Badasa was that it was contagious. He could make friends with the other guys, adopt his style, and before you knew it, some of the patients had to pay tributes if they wanted to sit in the same place, go in the same toilet, have their urine bags emptied.

It's understandable why some employees are inclined to look for trouble. Some of them have families and they earn no more than $550 a month before deductions. They see the
helpless patients they're allegedly caring for as easy marks. A totally disabled man with a senior gets about $1,400 a month from the government tax free.

Some of the employees also supplement their income by 'run runners' for patients. Only a few will do this, and they'll do it only for patients they trust implicitly. Otherwise, their necks would be in a noose. The way it works, essentially, is that if you want a half-dozen cases of $2.50 in a liquor store, a run runner is at your service for a total price of $8.

Narcotics and prostitutes are available through the same system. I admit this isn't extremely widespread, but I personally regard it as serious. Hospital officials contend that, since there are about 14,000 patients at Hines, a small society, it shouldn't be astonishing that you find essentially the same vices and problems that exist in the larger society.

I have been disappointed to find that the public seems cognant only of the fact that many Americans (about 47,000) were killed or wounded in Vietnam and that the remaining hundreds of thousands who served there came home. Nobody seems to think of the fact that 159,000 are either wounded or that 7,700 came back blind or with missing or useless legs.

Sure, you read in the newspaper that a dozen or so were wounded from time to time, but that doesn't convey what really happened. It's not that you want to see the aftermath of all the gory splendor of Vietnam, just take a stroll through the second-floor spinal injuries section at Hines.

Few Americans, to be sure, considered Vietnam a noble conquest, and we certainly didn't come back to ticker tape parades. It was different than World War II and Korea, when, so I understand, all America seemed to be shouting, 'Hooray for the veterans!'

People not only don't give a damn today, but some of them are downright antagonistic toward you.

Once I was out of the hospital, I went into a bar to keep a date with a waitress. A drunk at the bar turned to me and yelled, "You came in here in that wheelchair because you want a free drink. I know your kind. I had polio, but I had enough guts to get up!"

I tried to ignore him, but then he came over and whirled me around in the wheelchair and threw a drink in my face. 'There's your free drink. I won't buy you another one.'

God, I wanted to walk then. I prayed, "just two minutes, Lord. I prayed to the devil, "if you want my soul, just let me walk two minutes.

Another time, I went with a young lady to a downtown restaurant where there was a long line of people waiting to be seated. A waiter came over to us and said, "I have a table ready for you." He wheeled me around several couples who had been waiting longer than we had.

The restaurant had a special section set aside for wheelchairs—not to put you where you wouldn't be seen, but a place where you could be comfortable and still not feel shunted aside. I thanked the waiter.

Then a woman who had been waiting in line a long time came up to me and said something along your mind. She berated me for being disrespectful to her and asked, "how did you get hurt anyway?"

I said I was shot in Vietnam. "Well," she said, "you certainly deserved it."

Thirty seconds, Lord, please.

Once I was in a bar where I was in my wheelchair and more and more people kept crowding on it. A woman tore her dress on the brake of the chair. She blamed me for it, rather abusively.

But I was ready with a classic come-back: "I hope, madam, that in the next life our roles aren't reversed, so that I won't rip my dress on your wheelchair."

The Vietnam Memorial reflects the attitudes of the public and the White House. The public would prefer not to be reminded of us, and the president shows his gratitude by trying to cut VA benefits by $7 billion.

And where do you suppose are the people and the flags? They were greatly in evidence in the returning prisoners of war. But their absence now goes to show, I think, that whoever you were killed in Vietnam, you were a prisoner, you just don't count.

Most severely disabled veterans, frankly, are not overly impressed that an American prisoner spent 22 years in China or eight years in Hanoi. We're glad, of course, that they came back.

But now we are the only POWs. Guys who are blind or crippled are going to be POWs as long as they live.

There is no time limit—not eight years, or 22—on that kind of imprisonment.

Mr. SCOTT of Pennsylvania. Mr. President, I join the distinguished majority leader in offering this resolution. We have paid our respects and shown our support of those Americans who made the supreme sacrifice.

As the distinguished majority leader has noted, many of these returned veterans are permanent POW's living with their disabilities, adjusting as well as they may to the world to which they returned after they had done their duty to us, and had followed the precepts of duty, honor, and country and had served valuably and honorably.

Of the dead, there is a ceremony at remembrance day time in Australia where a verse is repeated every year. It is known to every Australian, it is known to many Americans, and I conclude with it in this tribute to the dead:

They shall grow not old,
As we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them.
Nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning.
We will remember them.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the resolution.

The resolution (S. Res. 117) was unanimously agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution, with its preamble, reads as follows:

303.625

Resolved, That the United States Senate shall dedicate itself to the debt it owes these Americans, and shall look to them as a living reminder of the tragedy of the Vietnam conflict, and Be It Further

Resolved, That on Memorial Day, May 30, 1973, special commemoration be accorded the 359,679 dead and wounded members of the Armed Forces whose loss and suffering were occasioned by the war in Vietnam.