

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
MEDAL OF HONOR CEREMONY

THE EAST ROOM

2:15 P.M. EST

Medal of Honor recipients and their families, distinguished Members of the Congress, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Middendorf, Secretary Reed, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ladies and gentlemen:

We are gathered here today to honor four Americans for exceptional military gallantry in the service of our Nation. All four of these men distinguished themselves above and beyond the call of duty. I deeply regret that one of the awards, to the late Captain Lance P. Sijan, of the United States Air Force, is posthumous. The other three, Rear Admiral James P. Stockdale, United States Navy; Colonel George E. Day, United States Air Force; and Lieutenant Thomas R. Norris, United States Naval Reserve, are here with us today.

We confer our highest decoration upon them for their inspiring and heroic conduct. We do this in realization of the simple truth that they have helped to preserve America's future peace by demonstrating through their courage the dedication of those entrusted with our defense.

Their bravery places them in the ranks of the finest of American heroes, from the present back to the year 1776, when we were forced as a Nation to first take up arms to defend our liberty.

These four men served in Vietnam. The war in Vietnam is now over. But as we today confer the Medal of Honor on heroes who distinguished themselves in Vietnam, we have not forgotten others whose fate still remains unknown.

We will continue on humanitarian grounds to press for a full accounting for these men, to resolve questions that keep many American families living in endless anxiety and agony.

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The United States today honors four men of uncommon courage with the Medal of Honor, but we can and we must also honor these men by living up to their example of patriotism. We can do this by fulfillment of our own duty as a Nation, the highest trust that we bear, the preservation of the safety and the security of the United States in a very dangerous world.

As we celebrate our Bicentennial year, we take satisfaction in our power to preserve peace through strength. We are today the strongest Nation in the world. As your President, I intend to maintain our total deterrent powers.

While we will do everything in our power to reduce the danger of war by diplomatic means, our policy for America's security can best be summarized in three simple words of the English language -- peace through strength.

I am gratified, as all of you are, that the United States is today at peace. No Americans are in battle anywhere. We have strengthened our vital alliances that preserve peace and stability throughout the world. By maintaining unquestioned strength and resolve we can command respect and preserve the peace.

We cannot win against the enemies of freedom, big or small, without the kind of vigilance and valor, symbolized by the Medal of Honor, the highest of all this Nation's decorations. We will win by patient and persistent pursuit of defenses second to none in a world that knows that America says what it means and means what it says.

By so doing, we will pay America's debt to the men that we honor today and the many, many others who served with such courage. A grateful Nation thanks its defenders for their resolve in keeping the United States of America the world's best hope of peace with freedom.

On behalf of the American people, I salute the cherished memory of Captain Sijan and the living example of Admiral Stockdale, Colonel Day and Lieutenant Norris. You served your Nation well and have given all of us a clear vision of a better world.

END

(AT 2:20 P.M. EST)