

# Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

## Digital Library Collections

---

This is a PDF of a folder from our textual collections.

---

**Collection:** Dolan, Anthony “Tony” R.: Files,  
1981-1989

**Folder Title:** Medal of Honor Ceremony  
(02/23/1981) (2 of 2)

**Box:** 1

---

To see more digitized collections visit:

<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/digitized-textual-material>

To see all Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Inventories, visit:

<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/white-house-inventories>

Contact a reference archivist at: **reagan.library@nara.gov**

Citation Guidelines: <https://reaganlibrary.gov/archives/research-support/citation-guide>

National Archives Catalogue: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>

*Last Updated: 04/29/2025*

Sgt Benavitez, those are the simple facts of your heroism. ~~A new~~ <sup>is new. One</sup> chapter in American valor that you have written ~~by~~ yourself.

"Where there is a brave man," Thoreau once <sup>said</sup> wrote, "there is the thickest of the fight, there the place of honor."

Yours was a place of honor, ~~Sgt Benavitez~~ Sergeant, in the service of a noble cause -- the cause of Vietnamese freedom. The families <sup>and their families</sup> men <sup>and their families</sup> on their families whom you saved that day <sup>new</sup> are grateful to you <sup>is the</sup> as <sup>is</sup> added our nation <sup>is grateful</sup> is grateful. To you expresses our gratitude to you today -- and to all those who served <sup>in a</sup> in the noble cause in Vietnam.

But I want you to know our gratitude today goes beyond words, <sup>legend</sup> <sup>this cherished</sup> or even this military decoration, as cherished as it is.

For today we acknowledge the lesson of Vietnam and Korea. we are a people of peace, ~~we~~ we must always <sup>remain so -- we must always</sup> are always willing to go <sup>a</sup> that last full mile to protect that peace. Military force is a last resort. We will never fight unless we must,

But today we also ~~pledge~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ seek to make it clear to the world: if ever

the world should also understand -- if ever again

if the hand of the United States is ever forced again,

*We pledge today:*

if ever again we ask our young men to fight and die for their country, <sup>shall</sup> their leaders will stand behind them until their victory is decisive and complete. There will be no prolonged

indecision, no protracted conflict, no privileged sanctuary.

<sup>If we</sup> If we <sup>our</sup> hand is ever forced again, -- For America -- there will be no substitute for victory.

In his book, The Bridges At Toko-Ri, novelist James Michener ~~w~~  
wrote movingly of the heroes of the Korean conflict --  
because of the nature of the twilight war in which they were  
heroes for whom there would be no ~~w~~blaring bands ~~and~~ or  
great parades ~~to welcome them home~~ because to welcome them  
home

There is a final scene in the book <sup>in which a carrier</sup> when <sup>at</sup> an ~~admiral~~ <sup>admiral</sup> stands ~~on the~~ <sup>on</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~bridge of an aircraft carrier waiting~~ <sup>for the pilots he knows will never return home....</sup>  
for the pilots he knows will never return home....

"<sup>at</sup> In the last he breaks the silence of that  
vigil, and asks in the darkness, "where do we get  
such men,, they leave this ship a tiny speck in the  
ocean <sup>to fly with us many times</sup> and they return....where do we get such men..."

Almost a generation later, in ~~another~~ <sup>the</sup> halfway twilight  
war, I found myself asking my wife that same question after  
I ~~had seen two men embrace~~ seeing two men meet in our  
home, hear each other's name and ~~throw~~ <sup>wrap</sup> their arms around each other  
--they were the closest of friends, knew every detail of each  
other's life but they were ~~separated~~ <sup>meeting</sup> each other face to face for the first  
time in their lives in our home. Their friendship had been built up over the  
years, tapping in code on the wall that divided their solitary  
confinement.

~~When our other prisoners of war~~ <sup>they had been</sup> in ~~Prisoner~~ <sup>Prisoner</sup>

We were like many Americans when our prisoners of war came home.  
What would we see when the plane door opened at Clark  
Field in the Philippines. Some of these men had been imprisoned  
and tortured for by savage captors for years. The door opened  
and we had our answer Admiral Jeremiah Denton came down the  
ramp, saluted the our country's flag, thanked us for bringing them home  
and said "God Bless America"

not long ago the simple phrase -- in war there is  
no substitute for victory.

let us never seek war -- the first responsibility of  
any national leader -- is peace -  
but if we are forced to defend ourselves let us realize that  
we must do so wholeheartedly we owe that much to those we ask to fight  
and die for us.

much from things we do not fully see --

another war long ago in that book Michener and at the  
end he said Where do we get such men , where do we get such  
-men.

I want you to know that a nation still asks gratefully  
with Michener's admirably grateful wonderingly, where do we get such  
where do we get such men?

wars fought at distance, on the enemy terms, hobbled by  
our questions desirous own desire to refuse to face  
the nature of the struggle we are in -- not none of this is  
possible.

yours was the place of honor --- from a thousand  
from the shops from the villages, from small farms outside  
a town in

during the lecture, I spoke of those who made our theories  
aerie during the inaugural is possible  
were gone and yet I saw them these heroes in my own  
living room and these words -- God Bless America.

someday in Saigon a memorial I believe that freedom  
will return someday to Southeast Asia and a grateful people  
in the city known again as Saigon there will be a memorial to the

Today sergeatn, we reaffirm our

Today we honor <sup>the</sup> a brave man <sup>we have known</sup> and in doing so noro  
all those brave men who gave so ;willingly of themselves  
in Vietnam.

I know Sergerat because of the unselfish person you  
are you frequently think of those men you were not able  
to bring out that day at Loc Ninth-- <sup>the this man</sup> perhpas you have even  
thought about them <sup>this morning</sup>.

-- and all oof those who nver returned from Vietnam.

For those men who fought in Vietnam, <sup>and all</sup> for those who  
never rturned I would ask now for a moment of silence.

"They shall ~~not~~ grow not old  
as we that are left grow old  
age shall not weary them  
nor the years condemn  
in the glory of their yout  
we will remember them



In his book, the Bridges at Toko Ri, novelist James Michner writes movingly of the <sup>heroes who fought</sup> Korean conflict ~~and~~ the ~~heroes who would never be greeted with blaring bands or~~ <sup>and their</sup> grand ~~parades because they fought in a cold twilight war~~ <sup>struggle</sup> that many at home wanted to forget. <sup>of</sup> <sup>being</sup> <sup>in</sup>

In ~~ne~~ of the book's final ~~se~~ scene, an admiral stands on the darkened bridge of his carrier waiting for pilots he knows will never return from their raid on the Toko Ri bridges.

Finally, he breaks his <sup>at</sup> vigil <sup>and</sup> in wonder at the selflessness of those ~~xxxxxxx~~ forgotten fliers -- <sup>(us)</sup> ~~also~~ in the ~~silent~~ <sup>silent</sup> darkness.... "Where do we get such men.... where do we get such men."

<sup>later</sup> Almost a generation, after another twilight struggle, many Americans found themselves again asking that question. Our prisoners of war ~~ahd~~ returned to Clark Air Force Base in the ~~Phillip~~ <sup>Philippines</sup> and despite a hideous captivity in North Vietnam <sup>down</sup> the ramp they came -- saluting the flag, thanking us for ~~ringing~~ <sup>bringing</sup> them home and then saying, proudly, "God Bless America."

• NOT LONG AFTER THAT MY WIFE AND I <sup>watched</sup> ~~saw~~ two of these men ~~as they~~ heard each other's name for the first time and <sup>from</sup> ~~watched as they~~ threw their arms around each other. They were the closest of friends, knew every detail of each other's life but they were ~~met~~ meeting each other face to face for the first time, ~~tho~~ there in our home. Their friendship had been built up over years, tapping code on the walls the ~~dvidided~~ <sup>divided</sup> their solitary confinement in North Vietnam. <sup>This was a story of</sup> <sup>clashes</sup> <sup>and</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>courage.</sup>

Sergeat Benavitez, those are the simple facts of your heroism. <sup>Sgt. is a hero</sup> A chapter in Amrrican valor ~~that is new~~ <sup>that is new</sup> one that you have written yourself, ~~and~~ <sup>into</sup> a story of actions ~~above + beyond the~~ <sup>above + beyond the</sup> call of duty.

"Where there is a brave man," Thoreau once said, "there is the thickest of the fight, there the place of honor."

<sup>Sody you take you will be</sup> Yours was a place of honor <sup>in this hall of mine.</sup> The men -- ~~and~~ and their families -- whose lives you saved that day near Loc Ninth are grateful to you -- as today our entire nation is grateful, ~~to grateful.~~ <sup>Grateful</sup> <sup>grateful</sup> to you, ~~and~~ and to all those who served a noble cuase in Vietnam.

But I want you to know our grtattitude goes beyond words, beyond even this <sup>highest of all</sup> ~~cherished~~ miliatry decorations.

We are a people of peace, we must always reamin so --

we must never fail to go <sup>to</sup> ~~that~~ last full mile to ~~protect~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~protect~~ that peace. <sup>We will do all in our power to avoid</sup> ~~and avoid~~ miliatry conflict. <sup>For us</sup> ~~Force is a last resort~~ <sup>Force is a last resort</sup> -- we ~~never~~ <sup>we</sup> ~~fight~~ <sup>never fight</sup> unless we must.

But the world should also understand ~~Force is a last resotr~~ -- e must never fight unless we must.

But let the world udnerstand <sup>has</sup> ~~that~~ the United Stae ~~has~~ <sup>has</sup> ~~learned~~ <sup>learned</sup> the lesson of Korea and Vietnam. IF EVER AGAIN

we must ask our young men to fight and die for their country, we pledge today <sup>on</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>their</sup> ~~their~~ leaders will stand ~~behind~~ <sup>behind</sup> them until <sup>their</sup> ~~their~~ victory is decisive and complete. There will be no prolonged indeicision, no protracted conflict, no <sup>We will do our utmost to avoid conflict, but</sup> ~~privleged~~ <sup>Can</sup> ~~sutitute~~ <sup>sutitute</sup> for victory.



# medal of Honor Ceremony -- Draft 2/27/8

In his book, the Bridges at Toko Ri, novelist James Michener writes movingly of the heroes who fought in the Korean conflict, <sup>He wrote of them</sup> and the hardship <sup>(as they) ed in</sup> of serving <sup>only</sup> in a cold, twilight struggle that many at home wanted to forget.

In the book's final scene, an admiral stands on the ~~darkened~~ darkened bridge of his carrier waiting for pilots he knows will never return from their raid on the Toko Ri bridges.

Finally, he breaks his vigil and -- <sup>wondering</sup> in wonder at the selflessness of those forgotten fliers -- asks in the silent darkness.... "Where do we get such men.....where do we get such men?"

Almost a generation later, after another twilight struggle, many Americans found themselves again asking that question. Our prisoners of war had returned to Clark ~~Air~~ Field in the Philippines and despite a hideous captivity in North Vietnam -- down the ramp they came -- saluting the flag, thanking us for bringing them home and then saying, proudly, "God Bless America."

Not long after that, my wife and I watched <sup>two</sup> ~~as~~ of these men heard each other's names for the first time and then threw their arms around each other. They were the closest of friends, knew every detail of each other's life but they were meeting ~~each other~~ face to face for the first time, ~~there in~~ <sup>our home</sup>. Their friendship had been built up over years, tapping code on the wall that divided their solitary confinement in North Vietnam. Theirs was a story ~~of~~ terrible torture and great courage.

Where do we get such men? The <sup>answer</sup> ~~anser~~ comes as quickly as we ~~ask~~ <sup>ask</sup> the question. We find them ~~where~~ <sup>where</sup> we have always found them: in our villages and towns, on our city streets, in our shops, on our farms.



Today we are in the presence of one such American brought up on a farm just outside of Cuero in DeWitt County Texas -- a man of selflessness, of gallantry and valor, an authentic hero.

Sergeant Benavitez, on May 2, 1968 in the dense jungle west of Loc Ninth Vietnam, you repeatedly risked your own life to save the lives of at least eight other soldiers. On that ~~xxx~~ day, you learned of a failed attempt to rescue a group of badly wounded soldiers who were pinned down under murderous enemy fire. You quickly volunteered to lead another rescue attempt and while directing this operation, you repeatedly exposed yourself to withering small arms fire, engaged in hand to hand combat, killed a number of ~~xxxxx~~ enemy soldiers and sustained more than nine severe wounds. Despite the crash ~~xxxxxxxx~~ of a helicopter during this second rescue attempt just as you had gotten all the wounded aboard -- and despite the severity of your wounds, you continued your struggle to survive and you reinstalled in your badly hurt comrades a will to fight and survive. Only after a final helicopter rescue and only after you had secured classified documents and gotten all the wounded to safety, you did you permit yourself to be flown out of the combat area.

Those are the simple facts of your heroism. It is a new chapter in American valor, one you have written yourself -- ~~was there~~ story of an American <sup>you</sup> who acted above and beyond the call of duty.

"where there is a brave man,": Thoreau once said, "there is the thickest of the fight, there the place of honor."

Yours was <sup>and is</sup> a place of honor, <sup>Sergeant,</sup> Those men -- and their families whose lives you saved that day near Loc Ninth are grateful to you ~~as~~ <sup>as</sup> today -- as today our entire nation is grateful <sup>to</sup> ~~as~~ you, <sup>we applaud in you</sup> take your place in this hall of heroes.

But I want you to know our gratitude goes beyond words, --  
beyond even this highest of all military decorations.

*will never*  
~~never~~ We are a people of peace, we must always remain so. We ~~must~~  
*it*  
*military* ~~never~~ fail to go a last full mile to protect the peace. For us,  
force ~~is~~ is always a last resort -- we will never fight unless  
we must.

But let the world understand what the United States has learned  
in Korea and Vietnam. If ever again we must ask our young men to ~~in~~  
fight and die for their country, *we vow that* our leaders will stand behind  
them until ~~their~~ victory is decisive and complete. There will  
be no prolonged indecision, no ~~protracted~~ *protracted* conflict, no privileged  
sanctuary. ~~We always do our~~ The United States will always  
do its utmost to avoid conflict, but if our hand is ever forced  
again, let it be understood, for America, there will be no substitute  
for victory.

today we have honored a brave man -- and in pledging  
to protect the sacrifices of ~~such~~ *father* men in the future -- we have  
honored all those brave men who ~~gave~~ so willingly *gave*  
of themselves in ~~noble~~ *a noble cause* in Vietnam.

I know sergeant, because of the unselfish person you  
are, you frequently think ~~at~~ perhaps even this morning --  
of those men you were not able to bring out ~~that~~ during those  
hours of fire and death near Loc Ninh.

And so I will conclude ~~them~~ by asking *you to join me in a moment of*  
*silent prayer*  
For those men, for all those who fought in Vietnam  
and never returned, ~~a moment of silence.~~

"They shall grow not old  
as we that are left grow old.  
Age shall not weary them,  
Nor the years condemn.  
In the glory of their youth,  
~~we will remember them~~