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VFW ceremony remembers, honors those missing in action

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By **BRYAN SHETTIG** / The Dallas Morning News
bshettig@dallasnews.com

ARLINGTON – Veterans, active-duty reservists and their families gathered Sunday to pay tribute to military personnel missing in action.

The ceremony at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8561 was steeped in symbolism for the missing, the dead and those still imprisoned.

On one table, a lone white candle burned. There were four empty chairs, one each for the Army, Navy, Marines and Air Force.

"The candle is to light the way home," said Glenn Bryson, an active-duty Navy reservist.

As the post's lights were turned off, the group of about 60 people lighted additional candles and prayed for the troops.

Arlington Mayor Robert Cluck told the group of his experience as a drafted medical officer in the Air Force during the Vietnam War.

Dr. Cluck said he was stationed in the Philippines and flew on a C-141 Starlifter cargo plane carrying wounded soldiers back to the U.S.

"On the way back we would lose one, two or even three men," Dr. Cluck said of the 14-hour flight.

Dr. Cluck recounted the story of a New York City man on his plane who had lost both legs in an explosion. The man said he couldn't wait to get home and celebrate being free from duty by joining his wealthy father's business.

"He died a few hours after telling me that," Dr. Cluck said.

Glen Talley, a retired Navy master chief petty officer and commander of the VFW post, said about 88,000 U.S. troops are listed as missing, including those who served in World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and both wars in Iraq.

"Our nation's mission is a promise to those who serve that we have their backs," he said.