

MR DOUGLAS BRIAN “PETE” PETERSEN

Citation for the conferral of a Doctors of Arts (*honoris causa*)

Douglas Brian “Pete” Petersen enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1954 after having attended the Iowa Wesleyan University for one year, receiving his commission in 1956. Following advanced fighter pilot training in 1956, his military career as a fighter pilot carried him to many different countries, including Germany, New Mexico and Thailand. Petersen was shot down over Ubon, Thailand during the Vietnam War in September 1966.

Petersen spent six and a half years as a prisoner of war. Injuries sustained during the crash of his F4C-Phantom II fighter, and subsequent interrogation prior to treatment of those injuries, left him in a highly traumatised state. Following basic treatment in hospital, he was later removed to a camp known as “The Zoo”, where the soldiers spent most of their time ensuring prisoners were isolated from each other. Despite the isolation and frequent bouts of severe depression, Petersen determined to survive the experience physically and mentally intact, and was freed in 1973, returning home to his wife and family in Florida.

Upon his return, Petersen continued to serve with the United States Air Force until his retirement in 1981 as a full colonel. Following his retirement, he started a construction company, but the death of his youngest son and the diagnosis of his wife’s breast cancer saw him join the staff of Florida State University and develop a program for juvenile offenders. He subsequently became headmaster of Dozier School for Boys, and the fight to prevent the closure of the school by Florida’s officials sparked his interest in politics.

Petersen ran for US Congress in 1990, seeking to represent the 2nd Congressional District of Florida. He won and served three terms from 1990 to 1996; during this time, he returned to Vietnam in 1991 as a member of Congress investigating US – Vietnamese progress on the Missing In Action/Prisoner of War (MIA/POW) program. Following his wife’s death, he announced he would not run for a fourth term. He was then nominated by President Bill Clinton early in 1996 as the first US Ambassador to Vietnam in 22 years – the nomination passed in a unanimous vote in 1997. Petersen’s mission in Vietnam has been described as one of “reconciliation”. He set out to repair relations between the US and Vietnam, increase the effort being put into the MIA/POW program, and further the country’s economic development – significant tasks, particularly given the Asian economic meltdown that began in 1997. One of his priorities was the establishment of a Bilateral Trade Agreement, without which the US could not conduct business relations in Vietnam by law – the US and Vietnam signed an “agreement in principle” in 1999, the precursor to a formal trade agreement. Petersen’s testimony at the Congress hearing in 1998 to decide whether to waive the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which was designed to prevent the US Administration from providing funding for trade and investment to countries that do not permit unfettered travel abroad and emigration by their citizens, resulted in the waiver of the amendment, thereby opening the door for the US to trade with and invest in Vietnam. In addition, he regularly appeared before Congress appealing for funds with which to develop and implement community-based programs for improvements to health, education and welfare. In 2002, Petersen set up Petersen International, a corporation specifically designed to facilitate trade by US companies in Vietnam.

Petersen was awarded the highest merit award by the Vietnamese Red Cross in 2000 in recognition of his humanitarian work as Washington's first post-war envoy. He resigned as ambassador in 2002.

Dated this Fifth Day of April Two Thousand and Six