

The American Legion Department of Florida



POW/MIA PROGRAM CHAIRMAN MANUAL

Revised 8.17.2026

Table of Contents

THE AMERICAN LEGION POW/MIA Advocacy	3
POW/MIA Flag History	4
Flag Protocol	5
National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing	9
Mission: POW/MIA	9
POW/MIA Recognition Day History	10
POW/MIA - Remembrance Day Service Script	11
POW/MIA - Table Service	13
POW/MIA - Empty Chair Service	14
THE POW/MIA Poem; by Tim Murphy	15
POW/MIA Bracelets	16
Purchasing an MIA bracelet	17
Bracelet Tradition	17
The POW/MIA Stamp	20
National POW/MIA Memorial & Museum	22
The United States Military Code of Conduct	23
Military Qualifications for Designation as a POW	23
Who are former prisoners of war?	24
Hague and Geneva Conventions	24
Additional Reference Materials	25

THE AMERICAN LEGION POW/MIA ADVOCACY

The American Legion is committed to achieving a full accounting of all POW/MIAs from the Gulf War, Vietnam War, Cold War, Korean War and World War II. This means the returning of living POWs, the repatriation of their remains, or finding convincing evidence of why neither of these are possible.

The American Legion supports the continued declassification of all POW/MIA information, the strengthening of joint commissions with Russia, North Korea and China, and adequate resourcing of investigative efforts and field operations to resolve POW/MIA issues. The American Legion has also worked continuously with both Congress and the Department of Defense to improve the policies and programs to achieve the fullest possible accounting of missing persons. This includes urging the president and Congress to fully fund the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) for its current and future mission of ensuring the accountability of U.S. service members. The American Legion will continue to speak out and exert maximum pressure on both the administration and on Congress to fully account for America's POW/MIAs.



POW / MIA FLAG HISTORY

The official U.S. POW/MIA flag resulted from the efforts of family members to display a suitable symbol that made the public aware of their loved ones who were being held prisoner or declared missing during the Vietnam War.

In 1970, Mrs. Michael Hoff, the wife of a service member declared MIA and a member of the National League of POW/MIA Families, recognized the need for a symbol honoring, POW/MIAs. Prompted by an article in a Florida newspaper, Mrs. Hoff contacted Norman Rivkees, Vice President of Annin & Company. The article stated that the company had made a banner for the newest member of the United Nations, the People's Republic of China, as part of their policy to provide flags of all United Nations member states. Mrs. Hoff found Mr. Rivkees very sympathetic to the POW/MIA issue. He and an Annin advertising agency employee, Newt Heisley, designed a flag to represent our missing men.

In January 1972, the League of Families Board of Directors approved the design of the flag and ordered some for distribution. Wanting the widest possible dissemination and use of this symbol to advocate for improved treatment for and answers on American POW/MIAs, no trademark or copyright was sought. As a result, widespread use of the League's POW/MIA flag is not restricted legally.

The flag was flown over the White House for the first time in September 1982, making it the only flag other than the U.S. flag to be displayed there.

On March 9, 1989, an official League flag – flown over the White House on National POW/MIA Recognition Day 1988 – was installed in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda as a result of legislation passed overwhelmingly during the 100th Congress.

On August 10, 1990, the 101st Congress passed US Public Law 101-355, which recognized the League's POW/MIA flag and designated it "the symbol of our Nation's concern and commitment to resolving as fully as possible the fates of Americans still prisoner, missing and unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, thus ending the uncertainty for their families and the Nation."

The 105th Congress passed the 1998 Defense Authorization Act requiring that the POW/MIA flag fly six days each year over specific federal locations. Those days included Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day, POW/MIA Day, and Veterans Day.

In 2019, the National POW/MIA Flag Act was signed into law, requiring the POW/MIA flag to be displayed whenever the American flag is displayed on prominent federal properties, including

the White House, U.S. Capitol, World War II Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, every national cemetery, the buildings containing the official offices of the Secretaries of State, Defense, and Veterans Affairs, office of the Director of the Selective Service System, each major military installation, each Department of Veterans Affairs medical center, and each U.S. Postal Service post office. Most state and local governments across the nation have adopted similar laws.

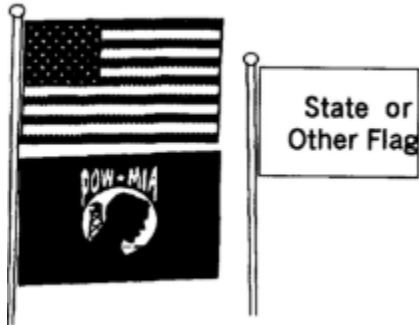
PROTOCOL FOR FLYING THE POW/MIA FLAG

- When flying the POW/MIA flag on the same flagstaff as the United States flag, the POW/MIA flag should fly immediately below the United States flag. If the United States flag and a state flag and/or other flag or pennant will be flown along with the POW/MIA flag on the same flagstaff, the order from top to bottom should be the United States flag, the POW/MIA flag, then the state flag or other flags, unless otherwise stipulated by your state flag code. On two flagpoles, the POW/MIA flag is flown on the same pole as the American flag, below the American flag (this pole should be to the flag's own right of the second pole). Any state flag should fly on the second pole. On three flagpoles, the American flag should be flown on the pole located to the flag's own right (the viewers left), the POW/MIA flag should be flown on the middle pole, and any state flag should be flown on the pole to the (flag's own) left.



- When flags are flown from two adjacent flagstaffs, the flag of the United States should be hoisted first and lowered last. The POW/MIA flag should be flown on the flagstaff with

and below the flag of the United States, which should be at the peak of the flagstaff. The state flag (or other flag) on an adjacent flagstaff may not be placed above the flag of the United States or to its right (the viewer's left) if the flagstaffs are of equal height.



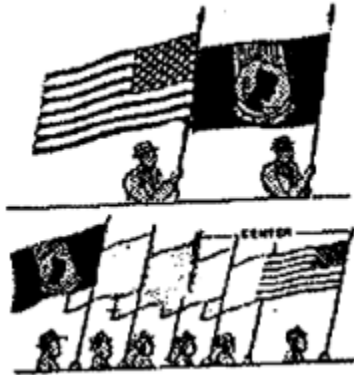
- When flags are flown from three adjacent flagstaffs of unequal height, the United States flag should be hoisted first and lowered last. The POW/MIA flag should be flown on the flagstaff to the right (the viewer's left) of the United States flag. State and other flags should be flown from the third flagstaff, unless otherwise stipulated by your state flag code.



- When flags are flown from adjacent flagstaffs of equal height, the flag of the United States should be hoisted first and lowered last, and no other flag should be flown to its right (the viewer's left). The POW/MIA flag should be flown on the flagstaff to the immediate left (the viewer's right) of the United States flag and state, or other flags flown farther left, unless otherwise stipulated by your state flag code.



- When the POW/MIA flag is carried in procession by itself, it should be carried front and center ahead of a marching unit. When carried in procession abreast with the United States flag, the POW/MIA flag should be on the marching left of the United States flag (top illustration). When a line of flags follows the United States flag, the US flag is centered on the line. The POW/MIA flag should be on the marching right of the line of flags (bottom illustration), unless otherwise stipulated by your state flag code.



- When displayed with the United States flag in crossed-staff format, the United States flag should be on the viewer's left with its staff on top of the staff of the POW/MIA flag



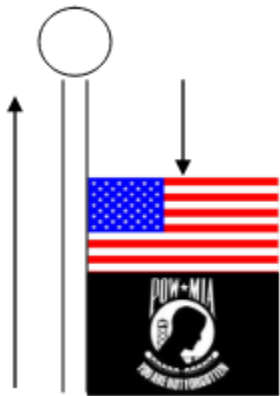
- When the POW/MIA flag is displayed on a wall, such as behind a speaker's platform, the flag must be displayed as shown.



- When the POW/MIA flag is displayed with the United States flag on a speaker's platform, the United States flag should be on the speaker's right and the POW/MIA flag on the speaker's left



- When flying the United States and the POW/MIA flag at half-staff, they should first be elevated to peak position, held there momentarily, and then lowered to half-staff. At the day's end, each should be again elevated to peak position before being lowered. If the flags are on different flagstuffs, the United States flag should be raised and lowered last.



For some time, there had been debate over when the POW/MIA flag should be flown, whether daily or on the specific six days noted in federal law. While not addressing the question of posting the flag at the national/federal level, the National League of POW/MIA Families at the 32nd Annual Meeting in June 2001, voted overwhelmingly in favor of the following resolution: “Be it RESOLVED that the National League of POW/MIA Families strongly recommends that state and municipal entities fly the POW/MIA flag daily to demonstrate continuing commitment to the goal of the fullest possible accounting of all personnel not yet returned to American soil.”

****National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing****

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF FAMILIES OF AMERICAN PRISONERS AND MISSING

The National League of Families is comprised of the wives, children, parents, siblings and relatives of military servicemen who were prisoners of war, missing in action, and killed in action (bodies not recovered) in Southeast Asia. Veterans concerned citizens and extended family members of POW/MIAs can join the League as associate members. The League is a nonprofit, tax-exempt, humanitarian organization that is funded solely on donations.

Originating on the west coast, the League of Families had its unofficial beginning in the late 1960s. Unsatisfied with the government's policy of keeping the POW/MIA situation secretive and discouraging families from publicity, the wife of a POW began a somewhat organized movement. By 1968, the first POW/MIA story was published, which caused families to communicate with each other. Soon they banded together, and the group grew from several to several hundred. The League was beginning to become politically active.

It eventually became necessary for the group to gain formality and recognition. In 1970 family members met in Washington, D.C. at Constitution Hall, where the League's charter and by-laws were officially adopted. A Board of Directors meets on a regular basis to discuss League policy and establish a direction for the group. The League is represented by State Coordinators and Regional Coordinators in state areas and multi-state areas.

MISSION: POW-MIA

Mission: POW-MIA is a relatively new but active all volunteer nonprofit organization launched in March 2023. It represents the families of all past conflicts with a goal of ending the uncertainty faced by generations of American's POW/MIA families.

They are pursuing our mission of achieving the fullest possible accounting of missing and unaccounted-for Americans from past conflicts through partnerships, research and outreach; by collaborating with like-minded organizations; advocating for our families as they S.E.A.R.C.H. for answers; conducting research and investigations to aid in case resolution to end uncertainty; informing and educating current and future generations; honoring the service and sacrifices made by past generations and their families and ensuring our Nation fulfills its promise to "leave no one behind."

The mission objectives are:

S – seeking the fullest possible accounting for our missing and unaccounted-for Americans

E – engaging with partner organizations

A – advocating for the families of our missing

R – researching and investigating for case resolution

C – conducting outreach and education

H – honoring the service and sacrifices of our missing and their families

<https://missionpowmia.org/landing-zone>

POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY HISTORY

Until July 19, 1979, no commemoration was held to honor America's POW/MIAs, those returned and those still missing and unaccounted for from our nation's wars. That first year, resolutions were passed in Congress and the national ceremony was held at the National Cathedral, Washington, D.C. The missing man formation was flown by the 1st Tactical Squadron, Langley AFB, Virginia. The Veterans Administration published a poster including only the letters "POW/MIA" and that format was continued until 1982, when a black and white drawing of a POW in harsh captivity was used to convey the urgency of situation and the priority that President Ronald Reagan assigned to achieving the fullest possible accounting for Americans still missing from the Vietnam War.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day legislation was introduced yearly, until 1995 when it was deemed by Congress that legislation designating special commemorative days would no longer be considered by Congress. The President now signs a proclamation each year. In the early years, the date was routinely set in close proximity to the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia's annual meetings. In the mid-1980s, the American Ex-POWs decided that they wished to see the date established as April 9th, the date during World War II when the largest number of Americans were captured. As a result, legislation urged by the American Ex-POWs was passed covering two years July 20, 1984 and April 9, 1985, as the commemoration dates.

In 1984 National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony was held at the White House, hosted by President Ronald Reagan. At that most impressive ceremony, the Reagan Administration balanced the focus to honor all returned POWs and renew national commitment to accounting as fully as possible for those still missing. Perhaps the most impressive Missing Man formation ever flown was that year, up the Ellipse and over the White House. Unfortunately, the 1985 ceremony was canceled due to inclement weather, a concern that had been expressed when April 9th date was proposed.

Subsequently, in an effort to accommodate all returned POWs and all Americans still missing and unaccounted for from all wars, the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia proposed the third Friday in September, a date not associated with any particular war and not in conjunction with any organization's national convention. Most National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremonies have been held at the Pentagon. On September 19, 1986, however, the national ceremony was held on the steps of the U. S. Capitol facing the Mall, again concluding with a flight in Missing Man formation.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day Ceremonies are now being held throughout the nation and around the world on military installations, ships at sea, state capitols, at school, churches, national veteran and civic organizations, police and fire departments, fire stations, etc.

****National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing****

POW/MIA REMEMBRANCE DAY SERVICE SCRIPT

Post Commander:

Today, we remember the heroism and sacrifices made by tens of thousands of our fellow Americans who endured captivity in enemy hands, as well as those whose fate remains uncertain.

Today, we salute the men and women who served and sacrificed to keep our Country free. We cannot forget to recognize the families of those missing in action, those who every day hold on to the hope that one day their loved ones will return home.

Today is POW/MIA Remembrance Day, a time set aside to recognize those men and women who remain listed as “Prisoners of War” or “Missing in Action” and to remind everyone of our Nations commitment “Keeping the Promise” to a full accounting for every one of our POW and MIA comrades.

Post Chaplain:

Our father, Almighty GOD, we thank you for wisdom to remember with reverence the valor and devotion of our separated comrades who became POWs and MIAs while serving their country to keep men free. Let us never forget them and be always ready to assist in locating them and returning them to their desired locations.

Lord of Hosts, comfort the wounds and the hurts they received and suffered during their time in confinement, while being punished for crimes they did not commit.

Lord, I beseech Thee, to strengthen the souls of our separated comrades who are in need, wherever they may be or in whatever state they may find themselves. This we pray in your Holy Name. Amen

Post Commander:

Approximately 80,741 of our fellow Americans remain unaccounted since the beginning of World War II. We have 71,688 from World War II, 7356 from Korea, 1565 from Vietnam, 126

from the Cold War, and 6 from the Gulf War, all fellow comrades whose fate remains unknown. These are fellow Americans who cannot enjoy our everyday freedom.

U.S. Congressmen Sam Johnson of Texas, himself a prisoner of war for 7 years during Vietnam has said “Until you have had your freedom denied, only then do you realize what we have in this great country of ours”. Freedom is what every man and women in military service, since the beginning of this great country, has fought and in some cases made the ultimate sacrifice to protect. Mr. Johnson went on to tell of an inscription he saw on the wall on the prison camp as he left, that said “Freedom has a taste to those who fight and almost die, that the protected will never know”. We can never adequately express our gratitude to those who have served our Nation while prisoners of war or to their families who experienced such anguish, fear and stress during the years of separation.

We are also indebted to the families of those still unaccounted for. They stood by with great courage as the ones they loved went off to defend the freedom we enjoy today. Many of these families have suffered decades of pain not knowing with certainty the fate of their loved ones. Our Nation and The American Legion are totally committed to continue the search for these loved ones until the fullest possible accounting is completed.

Post Chaplain:

Almighty God make us always aware of their absence. May we always keep the POW/MIA veterans in our prayers, remembering the possibility that they may be found, yet realizing as time passes, life also passes.

As Legionnaires, let us never fail to comfort their loved ones and their families and give them the help and encouragement they need. May we be ever ready to give our best to assist them and comfort them as they adjust their lives without their loved ones. We ask this in your Holy Name. Amen

Post Commander:

Please remain standing as we recognize all those who served our nation and have given the ultimate sacrifice including those former POW & MIA whose remains have been found and returned to their families.

We will now pay tribute to all veterans who have given the ultimate sacrifice to protect the liberty we all cherish

Post Commander: **HAND SALUTE**

BUGLER PLAYS TAPS

Post Commander: **TWO**

Post Commander: This concludes our POW/MIA Remembrance Day service. May God Bless our POW/MIA that remain unaccounted for and may God Bless America. Thank you.

POW/MIA TABLE SERVICE

Those who have served, and those currently serving in the uniformed services of the United States, are ever mindful that the sweetness of enduring peace has always been tainted by the bitterness of personal sacrifice. We are compelled to never forget that while we enjoy our daily pleasures, there are others who have endured and may still be enduring the agonies of pain, deprivation and imprisonment.

Before we begin our activities, we pause to recognize our POWs and MIAs.

- We call your attention to this small table which occupies a place of dignity and honor. It is set for one, symbolizing the fact that members of our armed forces are missing from our ranks. They are referred to as POWs and MIAs.
- We call them comrades. They are unable to be with their loved ones and families, so we join together to pay humble tribute to them, and to bear witness to their continued absence.
- The table is small, symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner, alone against his or her suppressors.
- The tablecloth is white, symbolic of the purity of their intentions to respond to their Country's call to arms.
- The single red rose in the vase signifies the blood they may have shed in sacrifice to ensure the freedom of our beloved United States of America. This rose also reminds us of the family and friends of our missing comrades who keep faith, while awaiting their return.
- The red ribbon on the vase represents an unyielding determination for a proper accounting of our comrades who are not among us.
- A slice of lemon on the plate reminds us of their bitter fate.
- The salt sprinkled on the plate reminds us of the countless fallen tears of families as they wait.
- The glass is inverted, they cannot toast with us at this time.
- The chair is empty. They are NOT here.

- The candle is reminiscent of the light of hope, which lives in our hearts to illuminate their way home, away from their captors, to the open arms of a grateful nation.
- The American flag reminds us that many of them may never return - and have paid the supreme sacrifice to insure our freedom.

Let us pray to the Supreme Commander that all of our comrades will soon be back within our ranks. Let us remember - and never forget their sacrifice. May God forever watch over them and protect them and their families.

POW/MIA EMPTY CHAIR SERVICE

STANDARD PROCEDURE

Empty Chair Ceremony for Placement and Removal of the POW/MIA Flag during Official Meetings of The American Legion

1. PURPOSE

The POW/MIA Empty Chair is a continual physical symbol of the American prisoners of war and service members missing in action who remain unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States.

Resolution 288, adopted at the 67th National Convention of The American Legion on August 27, 1985, calls for the designation of a POW/MIA Empty Chair at official meetings of The American Legion. The Empty Chair serves as a solemn reminder of our obligation to spare no effort to secure the release of Americans who remain prisoners, the repatriation of the remains of those who died in defense of liberty, and the fullest possible accounting of those who remain missing.

This procedure establishes a consistent, dignified, and respectful method for placing and removing the POW/MIA flag during an official American Legion meeting.

2. REQUIRED ITEMS

- One designated Empty Chair, positioned in a place of honor and clearly visible to the membership.
- Two chairs may be used when necessary to properly display a full-size POW/MIA flag.
- One POW/MIA flag or appropriately sized POW/MIA chair cover, clean and properly folded before the meeting.
- A Candle of Vigilance and lighter, if included as part of your Empty Chair ceremony.
- Designated personnel to conduct the ceremony, normally the Sergeant-at-Arms, POW/MIA Chairperson, or other members designated by the Commander.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

Commander:

Directs the ceremony, delivers the appropriate remarks, gives commands to the designated personnel, and maintains the solemnity and order of the ceremony.

Sergeant-at-Arms, POW/MIA Chairperson, or Designated Personnel:

Prepares, carries, places, removes, folds, and properly secures the POW/MIA flag.

All Members:

Participate respectfully and follow the Commander's instructions during the ceremony. When directed, members shall render the appropriate salute.

PART I — PLACING THE POW/MIA FLAG

4. PRE-CEREMONY PREPARATION

1. Before the meeting begins, position the Empty Chair in a place of honor where it is clearly visible to the membership.
 2. Ensure the POW/MIA flag is clean, serviceable, properly folded, and ready for presentation.
 3. Designated personnel shall determine in advance the route they will use to approach and depart from the Empty Chair.
 4. When two personnel are required to place a large POW/MIA flag over two chairs, they shall determine beforehand whether they will approach:
 - in single file; or
 - side by side, maintaining proper spacing and control of the flag.
 5. The designated personnel shall be properly attired and prepared to conduct the ceremony in a professional and solemn manner.
-

5. COMMANDER'S REMARKS

At the appropriate point in the opening ceremony, the Commander shall state:

COMMANDER STATES:

“Resolution 288, adopted at the 67th National Convention of The American Legion, calls for the designation of a POW/MIA Empty Chair at all official meetings of The American Legion. The Empty Chair is a physical symbol of the thousands of American prisoners of war and missing in action who remain unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States.

“It reminds us of our continuing obligation to spare no effort to secure the release of American prisoners, the repatriation of the remains of those who died in defense of liberty, and the fullest possible accounting for those who remain missing.

“Let us remember them, their families, and our solemn obligation to never forget.”

The Commander then directs:

COMMANDER STATES:

“The designated personnel will now place the POW/MIA flag on the Empty Chair.”

6. APPROACH AND PLACEMENT

1. The designated personnel shall approach the Empty Chair in a deliberate and respectful manner, carrying the folded POW/MIA flag draped over the **left forearm**.
 2. Upon reaching a position approximately one pace from the Empty Chair, the designated personnel shall halt.
 3. The designated personnel shall face the Colors of the United States and render a crisp, professional salute.
 4. After completing the salute, the designated personnel shall face the Empty Chair, step forward, and carefully unfold the POW/MIA flag.
 5. The flag shall be placed or draped over the Empty Chair so that the POW/MIA emblem or crest is clearly visible to the membership.
 6. The flag shall be positioned neatly and securely and shall not be permitted to touch the floor.
 7. After placing the flag, the designated personnel shall step back approximately one pace.
 8. The designated personnel shall face the Empty Chair and render a deliberate **slow ceremonial salute**, taking approximately 10 seconds to complete.
 9. Upon completion of the slow salute, the designated personnel shall turn toward the Colors of the United States and render a crisp salute.
 10. If a Candle of Vigilance is used, the designated member shall light it after the POW/MIA flag has been placed.
 11. The designated personnel shall then return to their assigned position in a respectful and orderly manner.
 12. The Commander shall then proceed with the Pledge of Allegiance, Preamble, prayer, or the next item prescribed by the organization's meeting order.
-

PART II — REMOVING THE POW/MIA FLAG

7. COMMANDER'S REMARKS

At the appropriate point during the closing ceremony, the Commander shall state:

COMMANDER STATES:

“As we conclude this meeting, we will respectfully remove the POW/MIA flag from the Empty Chair.

“The Empty Chair will remain as a reminder of those who are not with us and of our continuing obligation to remember them and their families.

“Let us remain mindful of our commitment to secure the release of those who may still be prisoners, to repatriate the remains of those who made the ultimate sacrifice, and to achieve the fullest possible accounting of those who remain missing.

“Designated personnel will now respectfully retrieve and secure the POW/MIA flag.”

The Commander then directs:

COMMANDER STATES:

“Members, prepare for the slow salute.”

8. REMOVAL PROCEDURE

1. The designated personnel shall approach the Empty Chair using the same route and bearing used during placement.
2. Upon reaching the Empty Chair, the designated personnel shall halt approximately one pace from the chair.
3. The designated personnel shall face the Colors of the United States and render a crisp, professional salute.
4. If a Candle of Vigilance is being used, the designated member shall extinguish the candle before the flag is removed.
5. The Commander shall then command:

COMMANDER STATES:

“SLOW SALUTE.”

6. All members shall render a slow, respectful ceremonial salute, taking approximately 10 seconds to complete.
7. After the conclusion of the Slow Salute the designated personnel shall step forward to the Empty Chair and carefully remove the POW/MIA flag.
8. The designated personnel shall ensure that the flag does not touch the floor or become soiled.
9. The flag shall be carefully folded into its prescribed configuration. If the flag cannot be completely folded at the chair without disrupting the ceremony, it may be draped over the

designated member's left forearm and properly folded immediately upon returning to the designated station.

10. Once the flag has been secured, the designated personnel shall return to their assigned position in a respectful and orderly manner.
11. The folded POW/MIA flag shall be returned to its designated storage location.
12. If the Empty Chair is permanently maintained by the organization, it shall remain in its designated location. If the chair is used solely for the ceremony, it may be removed after the POW/MIA flag has been secured.

9. CEREMONIAL STANDARDS

The following standards shall be observed at all times:

- The POW/MIA flag shall be clean, serviceable, and treated with the same respect accorded to the Colors.
- The flag shall never be permitted to touch the floor.
- Personnel carrying or handling the flag shall move deliberately and without unnecessary conversation.
- They shall be in proper attire wearing their official American Legion cover.
- The Empty Chair shall remain unobstructed and visible during the ceremony.
- The ceremony shall not be rushed.
- The Commander shall give commands clearly and allow sufficient time for each movement to be completed.
- Personnel assigned to the ceremony should rehearse beforehand, particularly when a large flag requires two individuals.
- The ceremony should be conducted with solemnity and dignity appropriate to the sacrifice represented by the Empty Chair.
- The POW/MIA Empty Chair is a continuing symbol—not merely a ceremonial prop. Its presence should remind every member of The American Legion of our enduring commitment to those who have not come home.

THE POW-MIA

BY TIM MURPHY-1986

I'm just a nameless silhouette; Nobody knows my face.

Though many of you pray for me each day.

The man you said you won't forget, in the dark and distant place.

I AM THE POW; I am a dead Marine;

I am the wounded grunt they couldn't find.
BUT I'M LIVING STILL, and I am long dead and I am somewhere in between.

I can't believe that I was left behind.

They killed me in an ambush, and they captured me alive,
and I died when my huey crashed and burned.

They over-ran my unit, but I managed to service,
And they beat me and they whipped me, and they worked me till I dropped.

To break my will, they made their best endeavor.

When great despair had gripped me, still the torture never stopped.

And they told me, We can keep you here forever.

They told me that my parents died, that my kids were grown and gone; and my
wife lost hope, and married my best friend. But there.

A PRAYER I HOLD INSIDE THAT HELPS ME TO GO ON, that someone still
remembers, and will bring me home again.

I'M JUST A NAMELESS SILHOUETTE; NOBODY KNOWS MY FACE.

Though many of you pray for me each day;

The man you said you won't forget in a dark and distant place.

I AM THE POW; I AM THE MIA.

POW/MIA BRACELETS

BY CAROL BATES BROWN

I was the National Chairman of the POW/MIA Bracelet Campaign of VIVA (Voices in Vital America), the Los Angeles based student organization that produced and distributed the bracelets during the Vietnam War. Entertainers Bob Hope and Martha Raye served with me as honorary Co-chairmen.

The idea for the bracelets was started by a fellow college student, Kay Hunter, and me, as a way to remember American prisoners of war suffering in captivity in Southeast Asia. In late 1969 television personality Bob Dornan (who several years later was elected to the US Congress)

introduced us and several other members of VIVA to three wives of missing pilots. They thought our student group could assist them in drawing public attention to the prisoners and missing in Vietnam. The idea of circulating petitions and letters to Hanoi demanding humane treatment for the POWs was appealing, as we were looking for ways college students could become involved in positive programs to support US soldiers without becoming embroiled in the controversy of the war itself. The relatives of the men were beginning to organize locally, but the National League of POW/MIA Families had yet to be formed.

During that time Bob Dornan wore a bracelet he had obtained in Vietnam from hill tribesmen, which he said always reminded him of the suffering the war had brought to so many. We wanted to get similar bracelets to wear to remember US POWs, so rather naively, we tried to figure out a way to go to Vietnam. Since no one wanted to fund two sorority-girl types on a tour to Vietnam during the height of the war, and our parents were livid at the idea, we gave up and Kay Hunter began to check out ways to make bracelets. Soon other activities drew her attention, and she dropped out of VIVA, leaving me, another student Steve Frank, and our adult advisor, Gloria Coppin, to pursue the POW/MIA awareness program.

The major problem was that VIVA had no money to make bracelets, although our advisor was able to find a small shop in Santa Monica that did engraving on silver used to decorate horses. The owner agreed to make 10 sample bracelets. I can remember us sitting around in Gloria Coppin's kitchen with the engraver on the telephone, as we tried to figure out what we would put on the bracelets. This is why they carried only name, rank and date of loss, since we didn't have time to think of anything else.

Armed with the sample bracelets, we set out to find someone who would donate money to make bracelets for distribution to college students. It had not yet occurred to us that adults would want to wear the things, as they weren't very attractive. Several approaches to Ross Perot were rebuffed, including a proposal that he loan us \$10,000 at 10% interest. We even visited Howard Hughes' senior aides in Las Vegas. They were sympathetic but not willing to help fund our project. Finally, in the late summer of 1970, Gloria Coppin's husband donated enough brass and copper to make 1,200 bracelets. The Santa Monica engraver agreed to make them, and we could pay him from any proceeds we might realize.

Although the initial bracelets were going to cost about 75 cents to make, we were unsure about how much we should ask people to donate to receive a bracelet. In 1970, student admission to the local movie theater was \$2.50. We decided this seemed like a fair price to ask from a student for one of the nickel-plated bracelets. We also made copper ones for adults who believed they helped their "tennis elbow." Again, according to our logic adults could pay more, so we would request \$3.00 for the copper bracelets.

At the suggestion of local POW/MIA relatives, we attended the National League of Families annual meeting in Washington, DC in late September. We were amazed at the interest of the wives and parents in having their men's name put on bracelets and in obtaining them for distribution. Bob Dornan, who was always a champion of the POW/MIAs and their families,

continued to publicize the issue on his Los Angeles television talk show and promoted the bracelets.

On Veterans Day, November 11, 1970, we officially kicked off the bracelet program with a news conference at the Universal Sheraton Hotel. Public response quickly grew, and we eventually got to the point where we were receiving over 12,000 requests a day. This also brought money in to pay for brochures, bumper stickers, buttons, advertising and whatever else we could do to publicize the POW/MIA issue. We formed a close alliance with the relatives of missing men - they got bracelets from us on consignment and could keep some of the money they raised to fund their local organizations. We also tried to furnish these groups with all the stickers and other literature they could give away.

While Steve Frank and I ended up dropping out of college to work for VIVA full time to administer the bracelet and other POW/MIA programs, none of us got rich off the bracelets. VIVA's adult advisory group, headed by Gloria Coppin, was adamant that we would not have a highly paid professional staff. As I recall the highest salary was \$15,000, a year and we were able to keep administrative costs to less than 20 percent of income.

In all, VIVA distributed nearly five million bracelets and raised enough money to produce untold millions of bumper stickers, buttons, brochures, matchbooks, newspaper ads, etc., to draw attention to the missing men. In 1976, VIVA closed its doors. By then the American public was tired of hearing about Vietnam and showed no interest in the POW/MIA issue.

WHERE TO PURCHASE

If you would like to purchase a bracelet, go to the web site of the National League of Families of Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia: <http://www.pow-miafamilies.org/> or many online vendors such as MemorialBracelets.com, Etsy.com, amazon.com. etc.

BRACELET TRADITION

Traditionally a POW-MIA bracelet is worn until the man, named on the bracelet, is accounted for. Whether it be for 25 days or 25 years, the bracelet is worn, and the man remembered.

After Operation Homecoming, those who wore bracelets with the names of returned POWs began to send the bracelets to the men and their families. Unfortunately, only 591 men returned, and thousands of men remained Prisoner or Missing with tens of thousands of bracelets still being worn.

Once Homecoming was completed, the repatriation of remains began. It was during this time that the tradition of returning a man's bracelet to his family began. Throughout the years the remains return program has met with varying successes and dismal failures yet remains continue to be repatriated. Some identifications are accepted by the families, some are challenged. Nonetheless, the tradition of returning bracelets remains a part of the POW/MIA history.

What do I do with my POW/MIA Bracelet once the person returns, his/her remains are identified, or I no longer want to keep it? <https://www.memorialbracelets.com/faq>

If you would like to do something meaningful with your POW/MIA bracelet or dog tag or tell the family what it means to you, please do not contact the family of the person engraved on your bracelet directly, but instead do one of the following:

1. Place it at the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC.
2. Write a reflection for that person on the Memorial Bracelets website. Many family members arrive at the page of their loved one when searching for information about them on the Internet.
3. Send the bracelet to the Palm Springs Air Museum. They are creating a display that features the bracelets of all the Vietnam War MIA's and POW's.

Dr. Dave Thompson
Lt. Cdr. U.S. Navy 1964-1970
10-103 Lakeview Dr.
Rancho Mirage, CA 92270
Phone: 760-328-0859
Email: dr.dave.psam@gmail.com

4. Send it to Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA)
Write a letter to the family of the POW/MIA making sure to include all your contact information in the event the family chooses to contact you.
Place the letter and the bracelet/dog tag in an envelope, seal it, add the proper postage, write your return address, and simply address the envelope to the Family of (Soldier's Name).

Write a letter to the respective serviceman's Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). In the letter, explain that the enclosed envelope contains a POW/MIA bracelet or dog tag, and request that it be forwarded to the family. If they have a current address on file, the DPAA will add the family's address to your envelope. There is no guarantee that this process will work. Many former POWs, MIAs and their families are no longer in contact with their Accounting Agency.

Place the DPAA request letter and the "To the family of" envelope inside another envelope, seal it, add the proper postage, write your return address, and mail it to the appropriate office below based on the serviceperson's military branch:

U.S. Air Force
(For World War II aircraft losses, contact the US Army POC below)
HQ AFPC/DPFCM
550 C Street West
JBSA-Randolph, TX 78150-4716
Tel: 1 (800) 531-5501

U.S. Army

Serves as POC for World War II US Army Air Force (USAAF) losses

Department of the Army

Attn: Past Conflicts AHRC-PDC-R

1600 Spearhead Div. Ave, Dept. 450

Fort Knox, KY 40122-5405

Tel: 1 (800) 892-2490

U.S. Marine Corps

Headquarters U. S. Marine Corps

Manpower and Reserve Affairs (MFPC)

Personal and Family Readiness Division

2008 Elliot Road

Quantico, VA 22134-5103

Tel: 1 (800) 847-1597

U.S. Navy

Navy Personnel Command Casualty Assistance Division (PERS-13)

5720 Integrity Drive

Millington, TN 38055-0000

Tel: 1 (800) 443-9298

State Department (civilian losses)

U.S. Department of State CA/OCS/ACS/EAP

SA-17, 10th Floor

Washington, D.C. 20522-1707

Phone: (202) 485-6106

THE POW/MIA STAMP



"Stamp Honors POWs and MIAs From ALL Wars"

Although there had been a POW stamp previously issued in 1970 during the war, and Vietnam had issued a stamp bearing the likeness of a stooped American POW walking in captivity, the POW/MIA stamp honoring men and women from ALL wars was an example of what many good people working together can accomplish.

Beginning in the 1980s, a grass roots movement began. [Handwritten](#) petitions demanded the US Post Office issue a stamp that honored ALL POWs, ALL MIAs from ALL Wars. By the hundreds, then thousands then hundreds of thousands

the signatures were collected. In pouring rain and blistering heat volunteers, veterans, family members, Ex-POWs and caring citizens stood in malls... on street corners... at street fairs... parades... in tiger cages... schools... wherever the public could be found, the petitioners could also be found. Door to door they went... and boxes and bags full of signatures were delivered to the US [Postmaster](#) General... to Congressmen and women... Senators. It was a blitz and with every refusal by the USPO, the volunteers were even more determined to see this stamp created.

Maybe it was the tens of thousands of trash bags filled with petitions delivered to the doorsteps of Washington... maybe it was the brick campaign protesting the 'stonewalling'... maybe it was the never ceasing determination of so many... maybe it was just time. In 1995, with millions of

signatures from around the world collected and almost 13 years of effort, the USPO announced a new stamp would be created... a POW MIA stamp.

The following is the official announcement of the POW MIA stamp.

March 29, 1995 - Stamp News Release Number 95-027 WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The symbolic representation of a pair of military identification tags embossed with the words "POW & MIA -- NEVER FORGOTTEN," displayed in front of the "Stars and Stripes" waving against a blue sky, comprise the unforgettable image on a new U.S. Postal Service stamp honoring American POWs and MIAs. First-day-of-issue ceremonies for the POW & MIA stamp will take place in Washington, D.C., as the stamps go on sale nationwide on Memorial Day, May 29. Customers should contact local post offices to find out where stamps will be available in their area on Memorial Day. "The ID tag has come to represent many things in the modern military," said Postmaster General Marvin Runyon in announcing the design. "The identification of each person as a unique individual who has the right to hope, to survive, and to ultimately have life after the wounds of combat. "It is a symbol of accounting for and caring for all our men and women in uniform. It is a symbol for commemorating and remembering all our POWs and MIAs -- from the Revolutionary War to Somalia." Many veterans save their ID tags as treasured keepsakes, carrying them around their necks, in their billfolds, on their key chains, and stored with their valuable jewelry. They pass them down to their children and grandchildren as heirlooms. They reflect on them and remember the sacrifices they and others made -- and they remember those captured by hostile forces and terrorists, and those who remain missing in action. Carl Herrman designed the stamp after a concept created by Gary Viskupic of Centerport, N.Y. Herrman combined Ivy Bigbee's photo of the ID tags with an image of the American flag taken by prominent photographer Robert Llewellyn of Charlottesville, Va. The development of this stamp was coordinated with various veteran and family organizations. This is the second stamp issued by the Postal Service honoring America's POWs and MIAs. The six-cent "U.S. Servicemen" stamp, issued in 1970, read, "Honoring U.S. Servicemen -- Prisoners of War -- Missing and Killed in Action." [Sadly, these stamps are no longer in production.](#)

Previous Stamps Issued: Artwork: All POW-MIA Text Credit: History - All POW MIA, News Release - US Postal Office Public Domain



1970 Honoring US Servicemen: Prisoners of War Missing and Killed in Action



Vietnamese Stamp Issues Denoting

American POWs

Air War Commemoration Series: 1967

2,000th



Air War Commemoration Series: 1972

3,500th U S Aircraft Shoot Down

National POW/MIA Memorial & Museum

The National POW/MIA Memorial and Museum project was established in 2016, at the former Naval Air Station Cecil Field, Jacksonville FL. In June 2017 the City Council of Jacksonville approved the lease of 26 acres to the Memorial and Jacksonville Mayor Lenny Curry signed the ordinance in August 2017 making it official.

The purpose of the Memorial and Museum is to:

- Honor all former Prisoners of War (POW)
- Remember and never forget those Missing in Action (MIA) Heroes and the families who seek their return
- Establish a national destination for all branches of U.S. military to pay homage to all those service members who were Prisoners of War and are, or were, Missing in Action
- Recognize and tell the stories of those who were Prisoners of War, Missing in Action and those still who are still unaccounted for
- Educate the public on the POW/MIA issue through exhibits, interactive displays, videos, artifacts and memorabilia.

Why was the former Naval Air Station Cecil Field chosen as the location for this prestigious Memorial and Museum? NAS Cecil Field has had a rich history in POW/MIA recognition and recovery efforts. In 1973 the “Vietnam War Memorial” of POW/MIA pilots who flew out of NAS Cecil Field was erected adjacent to the former base chapel, now known as the Chapel of the High-Speed Pass. It was named “Hero’s Walk & Freedom Trees Memorial”; the site will be preserved and become part of the national project.

LCDR Michael G. Hoff was assigned to Attach Squadron 86 out of NAS Cecil Field. On 7 January 1970, he was launched from the USS Coral Sea for a combat mission over Laos. During this mission, his plane was shot down. LCDR Hoff remains missing and unaccounted for to this day. After her husband was shot down and declared Missing in Action, Mary Helen Hoff joined the newly created National League of POW/MIA Families, which had been incorporated in Washington D.C. just a few months prior.

During an interview she said that once in Washington she asked government officials, “What do I bury?” and the response was “Well, we will give you all the artifacts from the aircraft.” She recognized that something was needed to symbolize the plight of those Prisoners of War and Missing in Action. She contacted a flag production agency, Annin & Company, who with her input created the iconic and universally known POW/MIA Flag we fly today. When asked what sort of design she had in mind she said, “I don’t want a lot of colors. I saw a picture of one of those POWs wearing black and white pajamas. We need a stark black and white flag.” LCDR Michael G Hoff is one of the pilots honored at the Hero’s Walk & Freedom Tree Memorial. LCDR Michael Scott Speicher was assigned to Strike Fighter Squadron 81 out of NAS Cecil Field. On 17 January 1991, he was launched from the USS Saratoga for a combat mission over Iraq on the first night of Operation Desert Storm. LCDR Michael Scott Speicher’s remains were recovered on 2 August 2009. A Navy F/A-18 Hornet is on display at the Memorial. LCDR Michael Scott Speicher is one of the pilots honored at the Hero’s Walk & Freedom Tree Memorial.

For more information on the National POW/MIA Memorial & Museum, please visit their website: <https://powmiamemorial.org/>

THE U.S. MILITARY CODE OF CONDUCT

The United States Military Code of Conduct, Articles III through V, are guidelines for United States service members who have been taken prisoner. They were created in response to the breakdown of leadership which can happen in an atypical environment such as a POW situation, specifically when US forces were POWs during the Korean War. When a person is taken prisoner, the Code of Conduct reminds the service member that the chain of command is still in effect (the highest-ranking service member, regardless of armed service branch, is in command), and that the service member cannot receive special favors or parole from their captors, lest this undermines the service member's chain of command.

Military Qualifications for Designation as a POW

To be named as a Prisoner of War, the captured service member must be a "lawful combatant" entitled to combatant's privilege--which gives them immunity for crimes constituting lawful acts of war, e.g. killing enemy troops. To qualify under the Fourth Geneva Convention, the combatant must have conducted military operations according to the laws and customs of war: be part of a chain of command and wear a "fixed distinctive marking, visible from a distance", and bear arms openly. Thus, *francs-tireurs*, "terrorists", saboteurs, mercenaries and spies may be excluded.

In practice, these criteria are not always interpreted strictly. Guerrillas, for example, may not wear an issued uniform or carry arms openly yet are sometimes granted POW status if captured (although Additional Protocol 1 may give them POW status in some circumstances). These criteria are normally restricted to international armed conflicts: in civil wars insurgents are often treated as traitors or criminals by government forces, and are sometimes executed. However, in the American Civil War both sides treated captured troops as POWs despite the Union considering the Confederacy separatist rebels, presumably because of reciprocity. After the hunger strike by Bobby Sands and his IRA colleagues, the British government gave some POW privileges to IRA prisoners.

However, guerrillas or any other combatant may not be granted the status if they try to use both the civilian and the military status. Thus, uniforms and/or badges are important in determining prisoner of war status.

Show you care... Invite a POW as Guest of Honor to your next Post Dinner

American Ex-Prisoners of War

Florida State Chapter

727-372-7238

727-868-1102



WHO ARE FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR?

Since World War I, more than 142,000 Americans, including 85 women, have been captured and interned as POWs. Not included in this figure are nearly 81,500 Americans who were lost or never recovered. Less than one third (22,641) of America's former POWs since World War I are still living.

More than 90% of living former POWs were captured and interned during World War II. Most former POWs are in receipt of compensation for service-connected injuries, diseases, or illnesses.

In 1981, Congress passed Public Law 97-37 entitled "Former Prisoners of War Benefit Act." This law accomplished several things. It established an Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War and mandated medical and dental care. It also identified certain diagnoses as

presumptive service-connected conditions for former POWs. Subsequent public laws and policy decisions by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs have added additional diagnoses to the list of presumptive conditions.

For more information go to: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/persona/veteran-pow.asp>

HAGUE AND GENEVA CONVENTIONS

Specifically, Chapter II of the Annex to the 1907 Hague Convention covered the treatment of prisoners of war in detail. These were further expanded in the Third Geneva Convention of 1929, and its revision of 1949. Article 4 of the Third Geneva Convention protects captured military personnel, some guerrilla fighters and certain civilians. It applies from the moment a prisoner is captured until he or she is released or repatriated. One of the main provisions of the convention makes it illegal to torture prisoners and states that a prisoner can only be required to give their name, date of birth, rank and service number (if applicable).

However, nations vary in their dedication to following these laws, and historically the treatment of POWs has varied greatly. During the 20th century, Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany were notorious for atrocities against prisoners during World War II. “The terms of the Geneva Convention were ignored by the Japanese who made up rules and inflicted punishments at the Camps, that were encircled with barbed wire or high wooden fencing and those who attempted escape would be executed in front of other prisoners. In some Camps the Japanese also executed ten other prisoners as well. Escape attempts from Japanese camps were rare. (Extracted from website- “World War Two- Japanese Prisoner of War Camps”, page 1, para. 4). Current numbers of most American POWs are decreasing rapidly due to disabilities and age. A greater percentage of living POWs were captured and interned during World War II.

More than one-half million Americans have been captured and interned as Prisoners of War since the American Revolution. The largest number of POWs occurred during the Civil War when an estimated 220,000 Confederate soldiers were captured by the North and nearly 127,000 Union soldiers were interned by the South.

Since World War I, over 142,000 Americans - including 85 women - have been captured and interned as POWs. Not included in this figure are nearly 80,741 Americans who were lost or never recovered. The Department of Veterans Affairs in 2026 reports roughly the number of living POWs is 22,641. By Period of Service, they are: 20,370 – WW II, 1,800 – Korean War, 450 – Vietnam War, War on Terror 1990 - Present – 35.

In 1980, Congress mandated VA to conduct a study of Former POWs to assess their health needs and make recommendations for improvement of benefits and services. As a result, for more than 20 years, eligibility for health care and benefits has been liberalized, and an Advisory Committee on Former POWs has been established to advise the Secretary about the ongoing needs of POWs and their survivors.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE MATERIALS **POW/MIA BOOKS, YouTube Videos & WEBSITES**

Books:

- Recommended books by the National Alliance of Families POW/MIA:
<https://www.nationalalliance.org/who-we-are/read-this-watch-that>
- Best Vietnam POW/MIA books about missing prisoners who were abandoned in Vietnam by the U.S. Government:
https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/114996.Best_Vietnam_POW_MIA_Books
- Unwavering: <https://www.unwaveringbook.com/>

YouTube:

The following POW/MIA playlist from YouTube is highly recommended viewing:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqUa6K14xoK-bIHcauWLOyNbYJrsGPATh>

Websites:

- Library of Congress <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pow/powhome.html>
- National Prisoner of War Museum <http://www.nps.gov/ande/>
- American Ex-Prisoners of War <http://www.axpow.org/>
- Defense POW-MIA Accounting Agency <https://www.dpaa.mil/>
- National POW/MIA Memorial & Museum <https://powmiamemorial.org/>

****The American Legion does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of the website link, YouTube or Books****

If you are able, save them a place inside of you and save one backward glance when you are leaving for the places they can no longer go.

Be not ashamed to say you loved them, though you may or may not have always.
Take what they have left and what they have taught you with their dying and keep it with your own.

And in that time when men decide and feel safe to call the war insane, take one moment to embrace those gentle heroes you left behind.

Major Michael Davis O'Donnell

1 January 1970

Dak To, Vietnam

On March 24th, 1970, Michael O'Donnell along with crew mates Berman Ganoe, John C. Hosken, Rudy M. Becerra, John Boronski, Gary A. Harned and Jerry L. Pool went Missing in Action. Although remains for all crewmen were not recovered, this crew is now considered accounted for.