

POW/MIA Recognition Day Tool Kit

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FACT SHEET

National POW/MIA Recognition Day

Since the American Revolution, people fighting to secure the freedom of the United States have at some points in time been held as prisoners of war (POWs).

But it took more than 200 years for our country to officially recognize the sacrifices made by those Americans who spent time in enemy hands or who were declared missing in action (MIA) from U.S.-involved conflicts around the globe.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day was established in 1979 through a proclamation signed by President Jimmy Carter. Since then, each subsequent president has issued an annual proclamation commemorating the third Friday in September as National POW/MIA Recognition Day. In 1997, President Bill Clinton further strengthened the importance of the day by officially designating it as one of the six days per year that the POW/MIA flag is required to be flown at designated federal government locations.

A national-level ceremony is held on every National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Traditionally held at the Pentagon, it features members from each branch of military service and participation from high-ranking officials.

In addition to the national-level ceremony, observances of National POW/MIA Recognition Day are held across the country on military installations, ships at sea, state capitols, schools and veterans' facilities.

No matter where they are held, these National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremonies share the common purpose of honoring those who were held captive and returned, as well as those who remain missing.

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POW/MIA Flag History and Display Rules

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 (PRC), 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 trade mark 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 US 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 Section 1082 of the 1998 Defense Authorization Act requiring that the POW/MIA flag fly six days each year over specific federal locations.

Those required days are:

- Armed Forces Day, May 16

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- Memorial Day, May 25
- Flag Day, June 14
- Independence Day, July 4
- POW/MIA Day, 3rd Friday of September
- Veterans Day, November 11

The required federal locations include:

- All major military installations
- National cemeteries
- All post offices
- Veterans Administration medical facilities
- The World War II Memorial
- The Korean War Veterans Memorial
- The Vietnam Veterans Memorial
- The official offices of the secretaries of state, defense and veterans affairs and the director of the selective service system
- The White House

Most state and local governments across the nation have adopted similar laws.

Display rules

When displayed from a single flag pole, the POW/MIA flag should fly directly below, and be no larger than, the United States flag.

If on separate poles, the U.S. flag should always be placed to the right of other flags. On the six national observances for which Congress has ordered display of the POW/ MIA flag, it is generally flown immediately below or adjacent to the United States flag as second in order of precedence.

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The POW/MIA or “Missing Man” Table

Sample Script

The POW/MIA Missing Man Table ceremony is a dignified and solemn moment in many formal dinners and other occasions.

There have been many different narratives written for the ceremony, but the symbolism is quite constant.

It involves a table, usually set off to the side, with a single chair. The table is set with a white tablecloth, a single candle, a book of faith (optional), an inverted glass, and a single red rose in a vase, around which is tied a yellow ribbon.

Set at the table is a plate containing a slice of lemon and a small amount of salt.

There is nothing more poignant than witnessing the empty chair sitting at a POW/MIA table with incredible significance for every displayed feature of this ritual.

Witnessing the ceremony that accompanies this memorable event brings more than just a single emotion.

The ceremony is performed many times, throughout the year, at official military events in remembrance and in honor of all POW/MIAs.

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POW-MIA MISSING MAN TABLE CEREMONY SCRIPT
(Performed by Honor Guard).

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
PLEASE DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION
TO THE CENTER OF THE GATHERING.**

AS YOU ENTERED THE DINING AREA, YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED A TABLE AT THE FRONT, RAISED TO CALL YOUR ATTENTION TO ITS PURPOSE – IT IS RESERVED TO HONOR OUR MISSING MEN (OR MISSING COMRADES IN ARMS, FOR VETERANS).

I WILL EXPLAIN.

SET FOR SIX, THE EMPTY PLACES REPRESENT AMERICANS WHO WERE OR ARE MISSING FROM EACH OF THE SERVICES – ARMY, MARINE CORPS, NAVY, AIR FORCE, COAST GUARD – AND CIVILIANS. THIS HONORS CEREMONY SYMBOLIZES THAT THEY ARE WITH US, IN SPIRIT.

SOME (HERE) IN THIS ROOM WERE VERY YOUNG WHEN THEY WENT INTO COMBAT; HOWEVER, ALL AMERICANS SHOULD NEVER FORGET THE BRAVE MEN

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AND WOMEN WHO ANSWERED OUR NATION'S CALL AND SERVED THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM IN A SPECIAL WAY.

I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU TO STAND, AND REMAIN STANDING FOR A MOMENT OF SILENT PRAYER, AS THE HONOR GUARD PLACES THE FIVE SERVICE COVERS AND A CIVILIAN CAP ON EACH EMPLTY PLATE.

(IN SILENCE OR WITH DIGNIFIED, QUIET MUSIC AS BACKGROUND, THE HONOR GUARD MOVES INTO POSITION AROUND THE TABLE AND SIMULTANEOUSLY PLACES THE COVERS OF THE ARMY, MARINE CORPS, NAVY, AIR FORCE, COAST GUARD AND A CIVILIAN HAT, ON THE DINNER PLATE AT EACH TABLE SETTING. THE HONOR GUARD THEN DEPARTS.)

PLEASE BE SEATED. I WOULD NOW LIKE TO EXPLAIN THE MEANING OF THE ITEMS ON THIS SPECIAL TABLE.

THE TABLE IS ROUND – TO SHOW OUR EVERLASTING CONCERN.

THE TABLECLOTH IS WHITE, SYMBOLIZING THE PURITY OF THEIR MOTIVES WHEN ANSWERING THE CALL TO SERVE.

THE SINGLE RED ROSE REMINDS US OF THE LIVES OF THESE AMERICANS...AND THE LOVED ONES AND FRIENDS WHO KEEP THE FAITH, AWAITING ANSWERS.

THE YELLOW RIBBON SYMBOLIZES OUR CONTINUED UNCERTAINTY, HOPE FOR THEIR RETURN AND DETERMINATION TO ACCOUNT FOR THEM.

A SLICE OF LEMON REMINDS US OF THEIR BITTER FATE, CAPTURED OR MISSING IN A FOREIGN LAND.

A PINCH OF SALT SYMBOLIZES THE TEARS OF OUR MISSING AND THEIR FAMILIES.

THE LIGHTED CANDLE REFLECTS OUR HOPE FOR THEIR RETURN.

(OPTIONAL) THE BOUND TEXT IS A BOOK OF FAITH TO REPRESENT THE STRENGTH GAINED THROUGH DEVOTION TO SUSTAIN THOSE LOST FROM OUR COUNTRY.

THE GLASSES ARE INVERTED - TO SYMBOLIZE THEIR INABILITY TO SHARE A TOAST.

THE CHAIRS ARE/CHAIR IS EMPTY – THEY ARE MISSING. (MOMENT OF SILENCE)

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LET US NOW RAISE OUR GLASSES OF WATER IN A TOAST TO HONOR AMERICA'S
POW/MIAs, TO THE SUCCESS OF OUR EFFORTS TO ACCOUNT FOR THEM, AND TO
THE SAFETY OF ALL NOW SERVING OUR NATION!

NOTE: The number of personnel can be varied from one to six. The ceremony can be altered as to the number of hats and personnel. You can place the hats as the latter part of the script is read. And invert the glasses as the script mentions it.

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SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: (Your name.)

Date: (Of the release.)

Phone: (Your contact phone number where you can be reached.)

(Installation or organization name) Commemorates POW/MIA Recognition Day.

(Installation or organization name) will recognize POW/MIA Recognition Day on 20 September 2019 at (time) to honor those who were held captive and returned, as well as those who remain missing from past conflicts.

The following event(s) will take place: (list the events that will take place on your installation or by your organization.)

For more information on the POW/MIA Recognition Day event(s), call (your name/ organization) at (phone number) or visit our website or social media platforms (list web address, social media platforms, etc.)

For more information about efforts to account for more than 81,000 Americans still missing from past conflicts, visit www.dpaa.mil.

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Social Media Samples

Here are some sample Facebook posts that you and your organization can adapt to suit your communication needs:

Prior to September 20: *“Come join members of (your organization) on Sept. 20 as we recognize National POW/MIA Recognition Day. We’ll have a special program to remember those who were prisoners of war (POW) and those who are missing in action (MIA), as well as their families. Go to our website for more information: (link to your website)”*

Early on September 20 (with an image of a POW/MIA flag): *“As go about your day, keep an eye out for POW/MIA flags. Today is National POW/MIA Recognition Day. When you see one, take a moment to remember those who served our country and have yet to come home.”*

During the day on September 20 (with an image of a POW/MIA flag): *“What’s with all of the POW/MIA flags out today? Today is National POW/MIA Recognition Day. The observance is to honor and recognize the sacrifices of those Americans who have been prisoners of war and to remind the Nation of those who are still missing in action.”*

Here are some sample Tweets:

“Today is the 3rd Friday in September. Know why it’s special? National POW/MIA Recognition Day. You are not forgotten.”

“More than 81,000 Americans are still missing from past conflicts. Remember them and their families today on National POW/MIA Recognition Day.”

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POW/MIA Recognition Day

Sample Speech

We gather here together today to recognize our nation's former prisoners of war and those still missing.

(If former POWs family members are present)

We're honored to be joined today by former POWs, individuals who endured captivity courageously and honorably during *(fill in wars/conflicts represented)*. *(Recognize each former POW by name and tell a little about them.)*

(If family members of former POWs or MIA personnel are present)

And we're also privileged to be joined by family members of those still missing and former POWs. *(Recognize the families represented and mention the name of their loved one who was a POW or is still missing.)*

And to all the families here today – whether you've been reunited or are still waiting for your loved one – thank you for your patriotism and courage in the face of uncertainty. We appreciate all you've given to this country.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day was established by Congress in Section 1082 of the 1998 Defense Authorization Act.

Since then, organizations such as ours have conducted events like this one to formally recognize those who gave an extra measure to protect our great nation.

Today is one of six days each year that the POW/MIA flag is required to be flown over specific federal locations, such as the White House and U.S. Post Office facilities.

Those required days are:

- Armed Forces Day, May 16
- Memorial Day, May 25
- Flag Day, June 14
- Independence Day, July 4
- POW/MIA Day, 3rd Friday of September
- Veterans Day, November 11

But there are many other days that you will see this now-familiar black-and-white image. Private citizens, organizations and businesses are free to display the POW/MIA flag whenever they wish. Many, like our organization, choose to fly this flag every single day.

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We do it to respect and honor those who have been held in captivity and returned, as well as those who have yet to come home from past conflicts around the globe.

Today, at the Pentagon, and in many other locations around the world, a ceremony similar to this one will be held. By being here today, you and I are part of a global effort to bring recognition to this noble mission and to remind the families of this special category of brave patriots that they are truly not forgotten.

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