



# **Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency National POW/MIA Recognition Day Tool Kit**

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## **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).

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, a law was enacted that 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.

[www.dpaa.mil](http://www.dpaa.mil)



## **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, 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.

### ***Display rules***

When displayed from a single flagpole, 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.

**[www.dpaa.mil](http://www.dpaa.mil)**

## **POW/MIA Missing Man Honors Table**

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

There have been many variations on the narrative 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 or chairs placed at a POW/MIA Honors Table with incredible significance for every displayed symbol.

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.

////////////////////////////////////  
**MISSING MAN HONORS TABLE CEREMONY SCRIPT**  
(Performed by Honor Guard).

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

AS YOU ENTERED THE ROOM, YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED A SPECIAL TABLE – 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 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 CAP, ON THE DINNER PLATE AS 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)

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.

###

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 September (date, year), 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 National 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.)

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency will host a National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at 10 a.m. on Sept. (date, year). People are more than welcome to attend the event in person or watch the ceremony via livestream. The livestream links are below:

For more information about efforts to account for more than 81,500 Americans still missing from past conflicts, visit [www.dpaa.mil](http://www.dpaa.mil).

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## POW/MIA Recognition Day Sample Social Media Posts

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

Prior to September 15: *Come join us on Sept. (date) as we recognize National POW/MIA Recognition Day at (location). The program is dedicated to remembering and honor those who were prisoners of war and those who are missing in action. Go to our website for more information. (link to the website)*

Early on September (date) (with an image of a POW/MIA flag): *“As you 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.”*

*The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency will host a National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at 10 a.m. on Sept. (date, year). People are more than welcome to attend the event in person or watch the ceremony via livestream. The livestream links are below: (links)*

During the day on POW/MIA Day

(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.”*

*“National POW/MIA Recognition Day reminds us of them and the tens of thousands of others missing from World War II, the Cold War, Korean War, the Vietnam War and other designated conflicts. We will not forget these patriots who were willing to give their all to preserve and protect our freedoms. Nor will we forget their families who have kept the faith and pursued answered these many years.”*

*“Our global efforts to obtain the fullest possible accounting of those still missing and to relieve the acute grieving and prolonged uncertainty of their families are a manifestation of this nation’s solemn obligation that these Americans will never be forgotten.”*

*Join us today at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific at 10 a.m. as we remember and honor those who are prisoners of war and those who are missing in action during the National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony. Links to watch the ceremony via livestream are below: (links)*

Here are some sample Tweets:

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

*“More than 81,500 Americans are still missing from past conflicts. Remember them and their families today on National POW/MIA Recognition Day.”*



## (Sample Speech)

### POW/MIA Recognition Day

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.

Last year, the National POW/MIA Flag Act was signed into law, requiring the flag to be flown wherever the American flag is displayed on prominent federal properties, including the White House, U.S. Capitol, War Memorials, every national cemetery, military base and more.

This legislation reaffirms our country's commitment to our missing and ensures that the words emblazoned on the flag continue to communicate a clear message of our unwavering support and commitment to our nation's heroes and their families. That message is this: you are not forgotten.

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.

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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