

<http://www.legion.org/powmia>

**Resolution 288**, adopted at the 67th American Legion National Convention, calls for designating a POW/MIA Empty Chair at all official meetings of The American Legion as a physical symbol of the thousands of American POW/MIAs still unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States.

## **POW/MIA Empty Chair**

This ceremony is a suggested outline that can be followed when an American Legion organization wants to call attention to Americans still unaccounted for from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and other conflicts.

Resolution 288, adopted at the 67th National Convention, encourages all American Legion organizations to implement the Empty Chair Ceremony at all meetings. As a continual physical symbol of the POW/MIAs and the cause for which we stand, namely their return or full accounting.

**Commander:** —A POW/MIA Empty Chair is placed at all official meetings of The American Legion, as a physical symbol of the thousands of American POW/MIAs still unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States of America. This is a reminder for all of us to spare no effort to secure the release of any American prisoners from captivity, the repatriation of the remains of those who died bravely in defense of liberty, and a full accounting of those missing. Let us rededicate ourselves for this vital endeavor!!

**Commander:** —Place the POW/MIA flag on the Empty Chair. *The first and second vice commanders, or other designated individuals, approach the Empty Chair carrying a folded POW/MIA flag. Upon reaching the Empty Chair, they reverently unfold the flag and drape it over the Empty Chair with the crest facing the membership.* After the meeting is concluded, the POW/MIA flag should be refolded and stored for future use.

## **POW/MIA Empty Chair Ceremony Rules**

The Committee will provide and set-up the contest area chairs and table for the ceremony.

The participants will provide the following: POW/MIA Chair Cover, American and Legion Table Flags, Tablecloth, Rose, Red Ribbon, Vase, Slice of Lemon, Salt, Glass, Bible, and Candle, Service Flags and Standard.

Eligibility: Only units composed of bona fide members of the American Legion, American Legion auxiliary, or Sons of the American Legion, in any combination thereof, over 18 years of age, will be permitted to compete with a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 8 members.

Team uniforms shall consist of military or American Legion type uniforms as approved by the contest chairman.

Inspection: General overall appearance of complete unit.

Following the inspection, members will move into position to begin the POW/MIA Empty Chair Ceremony.

The judging criteria shall be:

- Creativity, Impressiveness, Clarity, Ease of Delivery, Expression, and Self-Confidence.
- Accuracy: Exact reciting of the Ceremony as contained in the following scripts.
- Music, Lighting and other respectful effects may be used to enhance the presentation.

(Accuracy of delivery can be from memory or read from the scripts. Extra Credit can be earned if recitation is from memory.)

# **POW/MIA EMPTY CHAIR CEREMONY**

(This ceremony is not a replacement of, but an enhancement to, the Officers Guide)

## ***Required Script***

(Commander)

We would like to take this opportunity to remember the incredible cost paid by those who gave their all to help preserve the freedoms we enjoy, those gallant individuals who fought and died for our country. Yet, it is in remembering our fallen comrades that we are reminded of those whose fate is still unknown, those still listed as Missing In Action and Prisoners Of War.

More than 78,000 Americans are still unaccounted for from World War II; 8,100 from Korea; 120 from the Cold War; 1,810 from Viet Nam; and 3 from the Gulf War. These courageous Americans, who dedicated their lives to preserving and protecting our freedom, will never be forgotten.

To honor these men and women, we will perform the POW/MIA Empty Chair Ceremony.

*(The italicized script has been added to the original ceremony keeping within our guidelines of being able to add to but not subtract from an official ceremony)*

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 internment.

We call your attention to this small table which occupies a place of dignity and honor. It is being 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 our humble tribute to them, and to bear witness to their continued absence.

The **Table** is round symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner, alone against his or her suppressors.

*(The following script may be read or recited by the Commander or each member of the team as they perform their assignment)*

The **Tablecloth** is white, symbolic of the purity of their intentions to respond to their Country's call to arms.

The table is being **Set for One**, symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner, alone against his or her oppressors.

The **Yellow Ribbon on the Vase** represents the yellow ribbons worn on the lapels of thousands who demand, with unyielding determination, a proper account of our comrades who are not among us.

The **Single 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 reminds us of the family and friends of our missing comrades who keep faith, while awaiting their return.

A **Slice of Lemon** on the bread plate is to remind us of their bitter fate, *those captured and missing in a foreign land.*

The **Salt** being sprinkled on the plate is to remind us of the countless tears of those who have never come home and of the tears of their families and friends, whose grief knows no end.

*The **Bible** serves to remind us of the comfort of faith offered to those who face seemingly insurmountable challenges, and it also reminds us of our country being founded on the principle of One Nation Under God.*

The **Glass** is inverted; they cannot toast with us this day/night.

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 may never return and have paid the supreme sacrifice to insure our freedom. *The Flag of the American Legion, reminds us of our organization that has pledged full accountability for all who have not returned.*

The **Chair** is empty, our Comrades are missing.

*Commander:*

*As the Honor guard posts each of the five service flags, take this time to reflect upon the sacrifices of all veterans, especially those who have been or continue to be Prisoners Of War or who are Missing In Action.*

*Chaplain: "Uncover"*

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 sacrifices. May God forever watch over them and protect them and their families. *Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*Chaplain: "Cover"*

*Commander: "Attention, Hand Salute"*

*Bugler: Play "Taps"*

*Commander: "Ready, Two"*

*Commander: "This concludes our POW/MIA Empty Chair Ceremony. Thank you for your attention."*

*Commander: Retire your team.*