

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 POW/MIA chair cover, American flag, tablecloth, rose, red ribbon, slice of lemon, salt, glass, and candle.

Eligibility: Only units composed of bonafide 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 7 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 inspection, members will move into position to begin the POW/MIA Empty Chair Ceremony.

The judging criteria shall be:

- Impressiveness: Clarity, ease of delivery, expression, and self-confidence.
- Accuracy: Exact reciting of the Ceremony as contained in The Post Officers Guide for American Legion Posts and placement of items as pertains to the ceremony.

Accuracy of delivery can be from memory or read from the Officers Guide.
(Credit can be earned if memorized.)

POW/MIA Empty Chair Ceremony

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 Program 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. *Note: On pages 3-12 and 3-13, there is also listed for information purposes an alternative POW/MIA Remembrance Service that can be used at other functions in conjunction with the Empty Chair ceremony.*

Commander: "Resolution 288, adopted at the 67th 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 of America. Accordingly, at this time the Vice Commanders will place the POW/MIA flag on the Empty Chair 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 untold 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.)

The Commander (or appropriate official) will lead the Pledge of Allegiance (Legionnaires will remove their caps) and may direct the singing of the Star Spangled Banner.

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Regular Meeting Opening Resumes After The Pledge Of Allegiance

Commander: "Everyone will recover."

The Commander and membership shall recite the preamble of the Constitution of The American Legion slowly and in unison, as follows:

"For God and Country,

We associate ourselves together

For the following purposes:

To uphold and defend

The Constitution of the United States of America;

To maintain law and order;

To foster and perpetuate

A one hundred percent Americanism;
To preserve the memories and incidents
Of our associations in the Great Wars;
To inculcate a sense of individual obligation
To the community, state and nation; To combat the autocracy
Of both the classes and the masses;
To make right the master of might;
To promote peace and good will on earth;
To safeguard and transmit to Posterity
The principles of Justice, Freedom and Democracy;
To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship
By our devotion to mutual helpfulness."

**One rap of the gavel by the Commander will seat the members. The
Commander shall then say:** "I now declarePost No.....
Department of regularly convened."

The order of business for Post meetings shall be:

- a. Roll Call to determine if quorum is present.
- b. Reading of minutes of previous meeting.
- c. Introduction of guests and prospective and new members.
- d. Committee reports.
- e. Balloting on applications.
- f. Sick call, relief and employment.
- g. Post Service Officer's report.
- h. Unfinished business.
- i. Initiation of candidates.
- j. New business (and correspondence).
- k. Memorial to a departed Post member
- l. The good of The American Legion.

(The membership shall be permitted to make suggestions of any kind, character or description, save of religion or partisan politics.)

POW/MIA Remembrance Service

(The following is a "suggested" service to be used at American Legion meetings, banquets, luncheons, or memorial gatherings in conjunction with the POW/MIA flag draped over an empty chair ... this service can be adopted as is, or modified to whatever is appropriate for your own preferred use.) Members should remove their caps during this 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 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 the red ribbons worn on the lapels of the thousands who demand, with unyielding determination, a proper account 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 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."