

THE BACKGROUND OF THE POW/MIA TABLE

The Prisoner of War (POW) and Missing-in-Action (MIA) Table is, relatively, new when compared to the history of the United States Armed Forces.

In 1971, Mrs. Michael Hoff, the wife of a U.S. military officer listed as missing in action during the Vietnam War, developed the idea for a national flag to remind every American of the U.S. servicemembers whose fates were never accounted for during the war.

The tradition of setting a separate table in honor of our prisoners of war and missing comrades has been in place since the end of the Vietnam War. The manner in which this table is decorated is full of special symbols to help us remember our brothers and sisters in arms.

The POW/MIA table is smaller than the others, symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner alone against his or her oppressors. This table is separate from the others and can be set for one to four place settings to represent each service participating in the event.

Today, the tradition of setting a separate POW/MIA Table remains at every military ball, can be found inside every chow hall/galley and at events of military Veterans' associations across our great Nation. This tradition truly reflects the fact that we shall never forget our MIAs and shall remain resolved in bringing each and every one of them home.



www.history.navy.mil

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A Place Setting For One, A Table For All

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symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner alone against his or her oppressors.

The white tablecloth

draped over the table represents the purity of their response to our country's call to arms.

The empty chair

depicts an unknown face, representing no specific Soldier, Sailor, Airman, or Marine, but all who are not here with us.

The round table

shows that our concern for them is never ending.

The Bible

represents faith in a higher power and the pledge to our country, founded as one nation under God.

The black napkin

stands for the emptiness these warriors have left in the hearts of their families and friends. A Purple Heart medal can be pinned to the napkin.

The single red rose

reminds us of their families and loved ones. The red ribbon represents the love of our country, which inspired them to answer the nation's call.

The yellow candle and its ribbon

symbolize the everlasting hope for a joyous reunion with those yet accounted for.

The slices of lemon

on the bread plate remind us of their bitter fate.

The salt upon the bread plate

represent the tears of their families.

The inverted wine glass

reminds us that our distinguished comrades cannot be with us to drink a toast or join in the festivities of the evening.





**NATIONAL LEAGUE OF FAMILIES
OF AMERICAN PRISONERS AND MISSING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA**

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MISSING MAN TABLE & HONORS CEREMONY

As you entered the room, you may have noticed a special table; it is reserved to honor our missing men.

Set for six, the empty chairs represent Americans who were or are missing from each of the services – Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard – and civilians, all with us in spirit.

Some here were very young, or not yet born, when the Vietnam War began; 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.

Let me explain the meaning of this table, and then join me for a moment of silent prayer.

The table is round – to show our everlasting concern.

The cloth 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 their loved ones and friends who keep the faith, while seeking answers.

The yellow ribbon symbolizes our continuing uncertainty, the hope for their return, and our determination to account for them.

A slice of lemon reminds us of their bitter fate, captured and missing in a foreign land.

A pinch of salt symbolizes the tears of our missing and their families - who long for answers after decades of uncertainty.

The lighted candle reflects our hope for their return – alive or dead.

The Bible represents the strength gained through faith, to sustain us and those lost from our country, founded as one Nation under God.

The glass is inverted – symbolizing their inability to share a toast.

The chairs are empty – they are missing...(moment of silence)

Let us now raise our water glasses 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!

September 9, 2022