



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

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BACKGROUND: NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY

Until July 18, 1979, no special commemoration was held to honor America's POW/MIAs, those returned and those still missing and unaccounted for from our nation's wars. That first year, resolutions were passed in Congress and the national ceremony was held at the National Cathedral, Washington, DC. A Missing Man Formation was flown by the 1st Tactical Squadron, Langley AFB, Virginia. The Veterans Administration published a poster with the letters "POW/MIA" and that format was continued until 1982, when a black and white drawing of a POW in harsh captivity was used to convey the urgency of the situation and the priority that President Ronald Reagan assigned to achieving the fullest possible accounting for Americans still missing from the Vietnam War. For the next ten years, the various renditions of the American Eagle, by artist and Vietnam Veteran Tom Nielsen, came to symbolize America's POW/MIAs and our nation's determination to account for them and bring them home.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day legislation was introduced yearly until 1995 when Congress opted to discontinue considering legislation to designate special commemorative days. Since then, successive Presidents have signed an annual proclamation. In the early years, the date was routinely set in close proximity to the League's annual meetings. In the mid-1980's, the American Ex-POWs decided that they wished to see the date established as April 9th, the date during World War II when the largest number of Americans were captured. As a result, legislation advocated by the American Ex-POWs was passed covering two years, July 20, 1984, as initially proposed, and April 9, 1985, the latter of which had to be cancelled due to inclement weather, a concern that had been expressed with the proposed April 9th date.

The 1984 National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony was held at the White House, hosted by President Reagan. At this most impressive ceremony, the Reagan Administration balanced the focus to honor all returned POWs and renew national commitment to accounting as fully as possible for those still missing. Perhaps the most impressive Missing Man Formation ever flown was that year, up the Ellipse and directly over the White House.

Subsequently, in an effort to accommodate all returned POWs and all Americans still missing and unaccounted for from all wars, the League proposed the third Friday in September, a date not associated with any particular war, not in conjunction with any organization's national convention, and a time of year when weather nationwide is usually moderate. Most national ceremonies have been held at the Pentagon; however, in addition to the July 20, 1984, White House ceremony noted above, the September 19, 1986, national ceremony was held on the steps of the US Capitol facing the National Mall, also concluding with a flight of high performance military aircraft in Missing Man Formation.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremonies are now held throughout the nation and around the world on military installations, ships at sea, state capitols, at schools, churches, national veteran and civic organizations, police and fire departments, fire stations, etc. The League's POW/MIA flag is flown, and the focus is to ensure that America remembers its responsibility to stand behind those who serve our nation and do everything possible to account for those who do not return.