

National POW/MIA Recognition Day

National POW/MIA Recognition Day is a day of commemoration for servicemen unaccounted for and/or missing in America's wars. The first commemoration of this day was held July 18, 1979 at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. The date was chosen because it was around the time the League had its yearly meeting. On that day the 1st Tactical Squadron from the Langley Air Force Base in Virginia flew the Missing Man Formation, and the Veterans Administration made posters. These posters contained only the POW/MIA acronym, which was the standard poster format until 1982. To show the urgency of the situation (recovering POW/MIAs from the Vietnam War), the poster symbol was changed to include a black and white image of a prisoner of war in distressing circumstances, the same symbol used on the POW/MIA flag.

Although legislation for National POW/MIA Recognition Day was introduced year after year, in 1995 Congress deemed that it would no longer consider legislation of special commemorative days. Because of this the president now signs a proclamation, establishing the official date of National POW/MIA Recognition Day every year.

In the 1980s the Ex-POWs wanted Recognition Day to be commemorated on April 9th, which was the date the largest number of Americans was captured during World War II. In 1985, Recognition Day was scheduled to be observed on April 9th as the Ex-POWs requested.

However the ceremony had to be canceled because of bad weather.

Realizing that rainy weather is common in April, the National League of Families decided to choose another date, one that was not related to any specific war or any organization's national convention. The League chose to observe National POW/MIA Recognition Day on the third Friday in September. On Friday, September 19, 1986, the ceremony was held at the U.S. Capitol instead of at the Pentagon, where most of the ceremonies were held. It concluded with a Missing Man Formation flight.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day is a day to remember POW/MIAs and America's responsibility to do everything in its power to account for those who are missing or captive. Ceremonies are held from coast to coast and around the world at military installations, national veteran/civic organizations, ships at sea, state capitols, schools, churches, police departments, fire departments, fire stations, etc.