

## Chapter 12

### POW/MIA HAT TABLE CEREMONY

#### **12.1. Personnel.**

12.1.1. (1) NCOIC

12.1.2. (4) Hat Bearers

#### **12.2. Equipment.**

12.2.1. (1) ceremonial Army hat

12.2.2. (1) ceremonial Marine hat

12.2.3. (1) ceremonial Navy hat

12.2.4. (1) ceremonial Air Force hat

12.2.5. (1) ceremonial Coast Guard hat

#### **12.3. Support Materials.**

12.3.1. (1) Bible

12.3.2. (1) red candle

12.3.3. (1) yellow ribbon

12.3.4. (1) slice of lemon on a coaster with a pinch of salt

12.3.5. (1) place setting at an open table

12.3.6. (4) wine glasses

NOTE: All support materials should be supplied by the host.

#### **12.4. Preparation.**

12.4.1. NCOIC meets with host upon arrival at ceremony site to go over specifics:

12.4.1.1. Entrance cue.

12.4.1.2. Entrance and departure area.

12.4.1.3. Make sure that there is enough room around the table for all team members to walk.

12.4.1.4. Proper set-up of the table:

12.4.1.4.1. Yellow ribbon tied around red candle, placed in the middle of the table.

12.4.1.4.2. Bible is placed next to the candle.

12.4.1.4.3. Coaster with slice of lemon and pinch of salt on it is placed next to the Bible and the candle.

12.4.1.4.4. There is only one place setting with plate, silverware, and wineglass.

12.4.1.4.5. The other four wineglasses should be placed evenly around the table in empty place settings.

12.4.1.5. Have team practice at least once prior to the ceremony.

## **12.5. Sequence of Events.**

12.5.1. Fifteen minutes prior to ceremony the team lines up outside of the entrance: holding hats in correct Joint Service order, at waist level, and with the bill of the hat pointing out.

12.5.2. Once the narrator starts reading the POW/MIA HAT TABLE script the team is queued and enters the room headed toward the table.

12.5.3. Upon reaching the table the team circles it once and the NCOIC calls **HALT** when the Air Force hat is in front of the full place setting for the second time.

12.5.4. NCOIC calls **Ready, FACE** and the team faces the table.

12.5.5. The NCOIC starts the movement and at the same time all bearers move their right hands slowly around the front of the bill to the left side of the hat, touching their left hand. Then letting go with the left hand and keeping it in position, turning the hat around 180 degrees. Bearers then bend over and place hats in the place setting.

12.5.6. The bearers let go of the hat, stand up at attention and reach out with their right hand and cup the wineglass. All wineglasses will be lifted out in front of the bearers meeting in the center of the table. Glasses are turned upside down and then lowered back down to the table.

12.5.7. When the glasses are securely on the table the bearers come back to the position of attention.

12.5.8. NCOIC calls **Present, ARMS**. The bearers perform a three second present and a three second order.

12.5.9. Once back at the position of attention the NCOIC calls **Ready, FACE**. All bearers perform a right face, wait one count, and then step off with no arm swing toward the predetermined departure area.

**NOTE:** If the host wishes, after the dinner is over the team may go back in and get the hats. This is performed in the exact opposite order.

12.6. The table you see before you is set for those MIA that cannot be with us tonight.

-The table is smaller than the others...symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner alone against their oppressors.

-The four service hats...symbolizing everyone who has served in all conflicts.

-The white table cloth...represents the purity of their response to our country's call to arms.

-The table is round...to show our concern for them is never ending.

-The bible...is a symbol of our 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.

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

-The yellow candle and its yellow ribbon...symbolizes the everlasting hope for a joyous reunion with those yet accounted for.

-The slice of lemon on the bread plate...reminds us of their bitter fate.

-The salt upon the bread plate...represents the tears of their families.

-The wine glass turned upside down...reminds us our distinguished comrades cannot be with us to drink a toast or join in the festivities this evening.

-The flag is present to mourn the fact that many of them will not return to our shores, and to pay tribute to their passing.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Table of Honor.

12.6.1. The following is another example of the narration. This has been accepted by the DOD and is on their website.

As you entered the dining area, you may have noticed a table at the front, raised to call your attention to its purpose -- it is reserved to honor our missing loved ones [or missing comrades in arms, for veterans].

Set for six, the empty places represent Americans still [our men] missing from each of the five services -- Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard -- and civilians. This Honors Ceremony symbolizes that they are with us, here in spirit.

Some [here] in this room were very young when they were sent into combat; however, all Americans should never forget the brave men and women who answered our nation's call [to serve] and served the cause of freedom in a special way.

I would like to ask you to stand, and remain standing for a moment of silent prayer, as the Honor Guard places the five service covers and a civilian cap on each empty plate.

**Honor Guard:** (In silence or with dignified, quiet music as background, the Honor Guard moves into position around the table and simultaneously places the covers of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard, and a civilian hat, on the dinner plate at each table setting. The Honor Guard then departs.)

Please be seated ..... I would like to explain the meaning of the items on this special table.

The table is round -- to show our everlasting concern for our missing men.

The tablecloth is white -- symbolizing the purity of their motives when answering the call to duty.

The single red rose, displayed in a vase, reminds us of the life of each of the missing, and the[ir] loved ones and friends of these Americans who keep the faith, awaiting answers.

The vase is tied with a yellow ribbon, symbol of our continued determination to account for our missing.

A slice of lemon on the bread plate is to remind us of the bitter fate of those captured and missing in a foreign land.

A pinch of salt symbolizes the tears endured by those missing and their families who seek answers.

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

The glass is inverted -- to symbolize their inability to share this evening's [morning's/day's] toast.

The chairs are empty -- they are missing.

Let us now raise our water glasses in a toast to honor America's POW/MIAs and to the success of our efforts to account for them.

Courtesy of NATIONAL LEAGUE OF FAMILIES OF AMERICAN PRISONERS AND MISSING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA