

## POW-MIA CEREMONY

### Background

The POW-MIA Ceremony is generally used in conjunction with the opening of a dinner function. It originated with several of the ROTC and JROTC units in Florida and there are many different versions. Groups who use the ceremony modify it to suit their local requirements. For example, JROTC units often do not have access to hats and do not use them. Sometimes there are not enough people to do all five services so four are honored, instead.

The basic ceremony is provided below. There is a narrative section followed by an annotated script. Note that the script contains several suggestions for actions by the Honor Guard, which are in addition to those of the narrative. You should be selective and develop an approach, which works for the time and resources available to you.

### Set-up

This ceremony has many symbols. Below is a list of the materials needed to complete the ceremony. If you cannot find something to represent a symbol then omit that section of the ceremony. The music for the ceremony is AMAZING GRACE, preferably performed by a Drum & Bagpipe Corps. A tape of the music is satisfactory. It is started just before you begin to read the part, "LET US REMEMBER THEN UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ..."

### Materials needed:

POW-MIA Script	Black ribbon (tied to candle)
4 pair of white gloves	Framed, faded picture
Wheel Caps*	Red rose in a vase
Music – AMAZING GRACE	4 Wineglasses
Tape player	Salt
White tablecloth	4 Table settings
White candle	Slice of lemon
Small bread plate	Lighter or Matches
Yellow ribbon	

\*Caps for Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps (and Coast Guard if that branch is to be honored)

(NOTE: You may wish to add the Coast Guard as one additional branch of service. If you do, then make the appropriate adjustments in the instructions and script.)

### Honor Guard

You will need four members to participate as the Honor Guard (in addition to the narrator). They will bring out the wheel caps of the four military branches as they are recognized in the ceremony. All movements in this ceremony are slow and remorseful. There should be no jerky movements. The only sharp movement will be the facing movement at the end to leave the table after setting it. Hold the wheel cap in the right hand with fingers holding the rim. Your arm should be cradling the cap as you form an “L” from your shoulder to your elbow to your hand. It should rest on the forearm.

Once at the table, the Honor Guard members will slowly bring the left hand up and over the wheel cap to have the fingers at “5 o’clock”. Once there, the cap is pivoted on the tips of the fingers of the right hand so the wheel cap is now facing toward the Honor Guard member. There will be a slow bend at the waist to place the cap on the table. Once there, the member will slowly straighten up and slow salute the cap still keeping their eyes caged on the cap. After holding the salute for about four beats, slowly drop the salute and look straight ahead, eyes caged.

As the script is read, the Honor Guard will initiate some of the symbolic actions. Suggestions for these are included in the script below.

The narrator should try to memorize parts of the ceremony and practice making eye contact with the audience. This is very important as the narrator will set the tone for the mood of the ceremony. They should take a deep breath and pause before speaking each section.

### **Retiring the Table**

You may wish to retire the POW-MIA table at the end of the night. This is usually done before or during the closing comments by the Master of Ceremonies. The Honor Guard will come in again at funeral march pace and stand behind their respective wheel caps. One person will blow out the candle and stand upright. All four will salute at the same time slowly and will hold the salute. The music of TAPS will then be played. When the music is over the four will slowly order arms. The Honor Guard commander will then call a “Post” and “Forward, March.” The Honor Guard will then slowly march out of the room. A suggested script is provided below.

### **Materials needed:**

Music recording of TAPS or someone to play TAPS on a bugle or trumpet  
Tape player

## **POW-MIA CEREMONY SUGGESTED SCRIPT**

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PLEASE DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO THE CENTER OF OUR GATHERING.

(Off-stage cassette player plays "Amazing Grace" performed by bag pipes)

YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED THE TABLE SET BEFORE YOU. IT IS FILLED WITH SYMBOLISM. I WILL EXPLAIN.

THIS TABLE IS SET FOR OUR PRISONERS OF WAR AND THOSE MISSING IN ACTION -- FROM ALL WARS.

THEY ARE NOT WITH US TODAY. THEIR CHAIRS ARE EMPTY, BUT SAVED FOR THEIR HOPED RETURN. LET US REMEMBER THEIR ABSENCE.

(As the individual service is announced, a cadet enters with the appropriate wheel hat, places it on the table, and remains until the end of the ceremony)

LET US REMEMBER THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE, HONORED BY CADET \_\_\_\_\_.

(Cadet enters with Air Force wheel hat and places it on the table)

LET US REMEMBER THE UNITED STATES ARMY, HONORED BY CADET \_\_\_\_\_.

(Cadet enters with Army wheel hat and places it on the table)

LET US REMEMBER THE UNITED STATES NAVY, HONORED BY CADET \_\_\_\_\_.

(Cadet enters with Navy wheel hat and places it on the table)

LET US REMEMBER THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS, HONORED BY CADET \_\_\_\_\_.

(Cadet enters with Marine Corps wheel hat and places it on the table)

LET US REMEMBER THE UNITED STATES COAST GUARD, HONORED BY CADET \_\_\_\_\_.

(Cadet enters with Coast Guard wheel hat and places it on the table)

LET US REMEMBER THE MEN AND WOMEN PRISONERS OF WAR FROM ALL BRANCHES OF SERVICE THAT ARE TOO OFTEN FORGOTTEN. LET US REMEMBER THEM.

THE TABLE CLOTH IS WHITE, SYMBOLIZING THE PURITY OF THEIR INTENTIONS TO RESPOND TO THEIR COUNTRY'S CALL TO ARMS -- SO THAT THEIR CHILDREN COULD REMAIN FREE. REMEMBER.

THE LONE CANDLE SYMBOLIZES THE FRAILITY OF A PRISONER ALONE, TRYING TO STAND UP AGAINST HIS OPPRESSORS. REMEMBER.

(A cadet lights the candle)

THE BLACK RIBBON ON THE CANDLE REMINDS US OF THOSE WHO WILL NOT BE COMING HOME. REMEMBER

THE SINGLE ROSE REMINDS US OF THE LOVED ONES AND FAMILIES OF OUR COMRADES IN ARMS WHO KEEP THE FAITH AND AWAIT THEIR RETURN. REMEMBER

A SLICE OF LEMON IS ON THE BREAD PLATE TO REMIND US OF THEIR BITTER FATE -- IF WE DO NOT BRING THEM HOME. REMEMBER

(A cadet slices a lemon and places a slice on each bread plate)

THERE IS SALT ON THE PLATE, SYMBOLIC OF THE FAMILY'S TEARS AS THEY WAIT AND REMEMBER.

(A cadet shakes salt onto each bread plate)

THE GLASSES ARE INVERTED. THEY CANNOT TOAST WITH US TONIGHT -- MAYBE TOMORROW, IF WE REMEMBER.

(The cadets execute a slow bend at the waist and pick up the wineglasses to eye level. At the word, "INVERTED", the Honor Guard members quickly flip the wineglasses upside down with a twist of the wrist. Then slowly bring down the wineglasses to the table inverted.)

THE RED, WHITE AND BLUE RIBBON IS TIED TO THE FLOWER VASE BY A YELLOW RIBBON THAT WAS WORN BY THOUSANDS WHO AWAITED THEIR RETURN. REMEMBER

THE FADED PICTURE ON THE TABLE IS A REMINDER THAT THEY ARE MISSED VERY MUCH AND ARE REMEMBERED BY THEIR FAMILIES. REMEMBER.

AS WE LOOK UPON THIS EMPTY TABLE, DO NOT REMEMBER GHOSTS FROM THE PAST, REMEMBER OUR COMRADES.

REMEMBER THOSE WHOM WE DEPENDED ON IN BATTLE. THEY DEPEND ON US TO BRING THEM HOME.

REMEMBER OUR FRIENDS. THEY ARE THE ONES WE LOVE -- WHO LOVE LIFE AND FREEDOM AS WE DO.

THEY WILL REMEMBER WHAT WE DO. PLEASE HONOR AND REMEMBER THEM.

(The Honor Guard executes a slow salute together. They hold it approximately 10 seconds after the music has ended. Afterwards, the members slowly order arms and the Honor Guard commander will call "POST" and the members will execute a Left or Right Face. (Whichever is more convenient). "Forward March" will then move the members out of the room in a slow fashion.)

### **SUGGESTED SCRIPT FOR RETIRING THE TABLE**

(One cadet approaches the table ready to extinguish the candle. If the hats are to be retired as well, the entire Honor Guard should enter with one identified to extinguish the candle.)

AS CADET \_\_\_\_\_ EXTINGUISHES THIS CANDLE, LET US TRANSFER IT'S FLAME TO OUR HEARTS -- AND REMEMBER.

(Cadet extinguishes the candle and retreats.)

If you have more questions regarding this ceremony, you may contact the General Robert M. White Squadron of the Arnold Air Society at the University of Central Florida Air Force ROTC in Orlando, Florida. (407) 823-2659 or (407) 823-1247.