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**Services**

**GUIDE TO PROTOCOL**



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**SUMMARY OF CHANGES**

This interim change clarifies activities and sequences of events for various ceremonies. A margin bar (|) indicates newly revised material.

## 14.12. POW/MIA Ceremonies.

### 14.12.1. (Number of) Personnel Involved.

#### 14.12.1.1. (1) NCOIC

#### 14.12.1.2. (5) Hat Bearers

### 14.12.2. Equipment.

#### 14.12.2.1. Ceremonial Army, Marine, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and civilian cap (1 of each).

### 14.12.3. Support Material.

14.12.3.1. A round table, a white table cloth, six chairs, book of faith (optional), red rose displayed in vase, red ribbon, slice of lemon on a bread plate with a pinch of salt, place setting at an open table, and (6) wine glasses. (**NOTE:** All support material should be supplied by the host).

### 14.12.4. Preparation.

14.12.4.1. NCOIC meets with host upon arrival at ceremony site to review specifics: entrance cue; entrance and departure area; ensure there is enough room around the table for all team members to walk; proper set-up of table (red ribbon tied around vase and placed in the middle of the table; book of faith (optional) placed next to the vase; bread plate with slice of lemon and pinch of salt on it placed next to the book of faith and the vase; one place setting with plate, silverware, and wineglass; the other five wineglasses placed evenly around the table in empty place settings). The table should occupy a prominent position in the layout of the room.

### 14.12.5. Sequence of Events.

14.12.5.1. Fifteen minutes prior to the ceremony, the team lines up outside of the entrance: holding hats in correct Joint Service order (Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and civilian), at waist level, and with the bill of the hat pointing out.

14.12.5.2. Once the narrator starts reading the POW/MIA Hat Table script, the team is queued and enters the room headed toward the table.

14.12.5.3. Upon reaching the table, the team circles it once. The NCOIC calls “HALT” when the Air Force hat is in front of the full place setting for the second time.

14.12.5.4. NCOIC calls “Ready, Face” and the team faces the table.

14.12.5.5. 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 hat in the place setting.

14.12.5.6. The bearers let go of the hat, stand up at attention, reach out with their right hand, and cup the wineglasses. All wine glasses 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.

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

14.12.5.8. NCOIC calls “Present, Arms.” The bearers perform a three-second present and a three-second order.

14.12.5.9. 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 retrieve the hats; this is performed in the exact opposite order. All commands are subdued and called only loud enough for the team members to hear).

14.12.5.10. The playing of Taps is not part of the POW/MIA ceremony. The playing of Taps is symbolic of the death of a service member; it is not appropriate for POW/MIAs who have not been declared as deceased.

14.12.6. Script. The following is the recommended script according to the POW/MIA league of families and endorsed by the Department of Defense:

MISSING MAN TABLE & HONORS CEREMONY  
COURTESY OF  
NATIONAL LEAGUE OF FAMILIES  
OF AMERICAN PRISONERS AND MISSING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

**NARRATOR:** “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 (our men and women) still missing from each of the five services – Army, Marine Corps, Navy, 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 went 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.”

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

**NARRATOR:** “Please be seated (*pause*). 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 (and women).

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 loved ones and friends of these Americans who keep the faith, awaiting answers.

The vase is tied with a red 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 symbolized the tears endured by those missing and their families who seek answers.

(*Optional*) The bound text is a book of faith to represent the strength gained through devotion to sustain those lost from our country.

This 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 toast to honor America’s POW/MIAs and to the success of our efforts to account for them.”

**NOTE:** The number of personnel can be varied from one to six. The ceremony can be altered as to the number of hats and personnel. You can also place the hats as the latter part of the script is read and invert the glasses as the script mentions it.