



September Mayor's Report - Mayor Tom Hoechst - Freedom Is Not Free – National POW and MIA Recognition Day

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On Saturday, September 22, 2012, starting at 1:00 P.M., there will be a “Forget Me Knot” Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Alton Marina. This ceremony is free and the public is invited to attend.

Prisoners of War (POWs), Missing in Action (MIAs), and their families pay a unique sacrifice to ensure that the liberties embodied in the Constitution are enjoyed by all Americans today. Without their sacrifices, the freedoms that many of us take for granted would not exist. These brave men and women are not forgotten and live in the hearts and minds of all of those who love this country.

Did you know that prior to July 18, 1979, no national commemoration was held to honor America's POWs and MIAs, those returned and those still missing and unaccounted for, from our nation's wars?

By the end of the Vietnam War, more than 2,500 service members were listed by the Department of Defense as POW or MIA. In 1979, as families of the missing pressed for full accountability, Congress and the President proclaimed the first National POW/MIA Recognition Day to acknowledge the families' concerns and symbolize the steadfast resolve of the American people to never forget the men and women who gave up their freedom protecting ours. In the mid-1980s, 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 numbers of Americans were captured. Subsequently, in an effort to accommodate all POWs and all Americans still missing and unaccounted for from all wars, the National League of Families proposed the third Friday in September.

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

In 1971, Mrs. Michael Hoff, the wife of a U.S. military officer listed as missing in action during the Vietnam War, developed the idea for a national flag to remind every American of the U.S. service members whose fates were never accounted for during the war. The black and white image of a gaunt silhouette, a strand of barbed wire, and an ominous watchtower was designed. In 1982, the POW/MIA flag became the only flag, other than the Stars and Stripes, to fly over the White House in Washington, D.C.

On September 22nd, we will honor those individuals and their families that endured captivity so that the rest of us could remain free. We will also pause for those that did not come home. One wreath will be laid for each branch of the service to honor all veterans past, present, and future. Never forget, "Freedom is not Free."