

MEMO: It has been brought to my attention from former POWs from the Viet Nam era that the POW-MIA flag somewhat misrepresents the spirit of those who were incarcerated there.

It is proposed that the POW-MIA flag be slightly modified to reflect a more positive spirit of the POW depicted on it so that instead of his head being bowed in defeat and submission, it be raised in a spirit of hope in the future and defiance toward the enemy.

The POW-MIA flag is a powerful symbol that was designed as a material representation of the resolve of the American people and their government to make an accounting of POWs and MIAs of the Viet Nam War. The US Congress officially recognized by law the flag and what it represented. Since then the flag has come to symbolize to the American people that same resolve toward POWs and MIAs of *all* wars.

Those men who were actually imprisoned in Communist POW camps during the Viet Nam War were deeply honored to learn of the existence of the flag along with the memory bracelets that many of their family, friends and even strangers wore. These symbols were a daily reminder that our POWs would return home someday, and the search for those missing in action would continue until all were found or accounted for.

During their captivity, the POWs never relented in their devotion to their county or their resistance to the enemy in spite of the horrible conditions and brutal treatment they suffered which included torture and even murder. This cruel treatment included every possible attempt to break the will of the prisoners and to have them become submissive.

As a sign of submissiveness, the prisoners were forced to bow to their captors. Yet this act of humiliation was not carried out willingly; indeed, only after beatings and torture would the prisoners perform the bowing ritual. Even then, they found some way to make some sort of sign, no matter how subtle, of resistance. Sometimes this was nothing more than the prisoners crossing their fingers when they bowed. No matter how small the sign, it was their way of saying to themselves—I do not do this willingly. Many of them recalled the words of William Ernest Henley in his poem *Invictus*, “My head is bloodied but unbowed.”

Thus, to them the symbol of the prisoner on the POW-MIA flag, in spite of the honorable intentions of its designer, can be seen as an image of defeat and lack of resolve. Some may see the image as that of someone in prayer, but the setting in the flag is not a place of worship but a prison with barbed wire and a guard tower. Besides, a person might also pray with head held up to the heavens such as in the words of the Old Testament, Psalm 121, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my salvation.”

Relative to this issue is the burden that many veterans of the Viet Nam War bear from the mistreatment and hatred shown them by their own citizens when they returned from combat. They were not welcomed, and many of them felt that they could not hold up their head in pride for what they believed they were doing for their nation and the free people of Viet Nam.

How fitting it would be, on the upcoming occasion of the 40th anniversary of the end of the Viet Nam War, in celebration of when the last troops had finally set foot in their homeland, March 30, 1973, that the POW-MIA flag would be slightly modified so that the person depicted holds his head high, not only reflecting the faith and resolve of the POWs in their camps with heads uplifted in strength, but also the pride of all Viet Nam veterans--that on this 40th anniversary of their homecoming, the nation had come together in appreciation of their service and is indeed *welcoming* each one of them home. A time when they all can proudly hold their heads high as well.

An opinion of the members of the Advisory Committee on this matter is solicited.

TO SEND YOUR REPLY COMMENT, CONCERNING THIS REQUEST
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