



A MOMENT OF NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION  
CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
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*\*Center for International Ethics\**



*\*ROTC\* \*Veterans Resource Center\**

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## About the POW (Prisoner of War)/MIA (Missing in Action) Flag\*

On a snowy morning in January 1966, Evelyn Grubb (1931-2005), mother of three and pregnant with a fourth child, was at home in Petersburg, VA. when a knock came at the front door. A Western Union driver handed her a telegram informing her that her husband, Air Force Captain Wilmer Newlin “Newk” Grubb (1932-1966), was shot down while flying his reconnaissance airplane over North Vietnam. Shocked by the news, her sons, Jeffrey (9), Roland (5), and Stephen (“Van”) (2), sought help from the neighbors. Newk Grubb was declared Missing In Action (MIA). Uncertain about whether Newk had survived the crash, Evelyn was stunned

when a friend phoned her weeks later to tell her that he had seen Newk, clearly alive, in a photo published a U.S. newspaper which portrays a Vietnamese nurse tending to his wounds while soldiers stand behind him with fixed bayonets (see back of this brochure for the photo). Naturally, the hope of Newk’s survival was rekindled and Evelyn began laboring for the day on which she would be reunited with her husband. Wilmer’s status was changed to Prisoner Of War (POW) on February 21, 1966. Evelyn soon became a formidable activist as she banded together with other wives and families of the imprisoned and missing to create the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia (“League”). Comprised primarily of the wives of POW/MIA, the League lobbied governmental officials to provide information about their missing husbands, and to enforce the 3d Geneva Convention which concerns the humane treatment of POWs. Eventually Evelyn ascended to position of National Coordinator of the League. In addition to meeting with President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger, Evelyn petitioned the United Nations, reminding nations of their legal duties towards Prisoners Of War



*Cadet Newk Grubb,  
Penn State University. 1955*

under international law. In February 1973, surviving POWs were returned to the U.S. as part of “Operation Homecoming.” Newk was not among them. The League continued their fight for a full accounting and to get the remains of those remaining in North Vietnam returned to the U.S. In March 1974, Newk and others were disinterred from various North Vietnamese grave locations, and returned to the United States. Today, Newk and Evelyn Grubb are buried alongside each other at Arlington National Cemetery.

Mary Hoff (1931-2015), mother of five, also received a telegram similar to the one received in 1966 by Evelyn Grubb. In 1970, Mary received news informing her that her husband, Navy Commander Michael G. Hoff, was shot down over Laos. It was Mary who had the idea for a flag as she wanted to hang something in her window to identify her family as a family of the Missing. Her vision was of a stark, black and white flag which originated from images of POW’s wearing black-and-white pajamas. Hoff worked with Newt Hisely, a World War II veteran, to design the flag. With input from Mary, Newt designed the POW/MIA flag to include the “You are Not Forgotten” language, betokening our moral duty to bring all soldiers home. Mary subsequently brought her design to a local chapter of the League, which embraced the flag as the symbol of their movement. Evelyn Grubb presented the flag to Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird in 1972. Unlike Evelyn who was able to realize some closure with Newk, Mary Hoff died without ever learning about the fate of her husband.

### ABOUT THE DEFENSE POW/MIA ACCOUNTING AGENCY (DPAA)

Beginning with the U.S. Civil War, women and families have lobbied the U.S. government to provide an accounting their missing family members. The sad fact is that a system of accounting, including the use of “dog tags,” had to be developed. This was done only after citizens agitated during the Civil War (1861-1866). 100 years later, the League built upon that earlier thread of effort. Today, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) ([dpaa.mil](http://dpaa.mil)) continues the work of accounting for missing U.S. personnel, fulfilling a moral duty that took over 100 years to fully ripen. In September 2019, the DPAA accounted for Pfc (Private First Class) John Shelemba of Hamtramck, Michigan. He was reported missing in action in Taejon, South Korea on July 20, 1950, and was 19 at the time. PFC Shelemba was identified in 2019, and will soon be interred in Arlington National Cemetery. The POW/MIA flag will fly until October 1, 2020 - which marks the 1 year anniversary of when the DPAA announced Pfc Shelemba’s accounting. To learn more about Pfc Shelemba, visit: [dutytoremember.com/Shelemba](http://dutytoremember.com/Shelemba)

## About POW/MIA National Recognition Day

A key segment of the history of the Vietnam War is a story about families, and specifically the wives and mothers of servicemen who went missing in Southeast Asia. Demanding an accounting of their husbands, the wives who comprised the original League (which still exists to this day) were told to keep quiet. The persistent, non-violent agitation, and the fortitude that these women possessed are among the treasures that help in the building of a true democracy where all voices are heard. Their work reminds us of the duties of us all to remember, to hear, and to never forget the sacrifice of individuals and their families. We are indebted to these civilians for using their political voices to move our country to a more humane plane.

The first recognition by the U.S. Government for Prisoners of War and Missing in Action was established by President Nixon who proclaimed a “National Week of Concern for Americans who are Prisoners of War or Missing in Action” from March 26 through April 1, 1972. Subsequent Presidents recognized additional dates throughout the following decades, but in 1986 the third Friday in September was designated as National POW/MIA Recognition Day by President Reagan. In 2020, National POW/MIA Recognition Day falls on September 18.

2020 marks the first time that Central Michigan University observes POW/MIA National Recognition Day. CMU’s Center for International Ethics (housed in the Department of Philosophy and Religion), the ROTC (Reserved Officers Training Corps) Program, and the VRC (Veterans Resource Center) have been planning this day of recognition since January 2019, and hence prior to the Covid-19 crisis. The crisis of course changed our original plans. What was originally planned as a single day of remembrance has evolved into a multidimensional educational experience, delivered both via “analog” form (e.g., this brochure and the Missing Man table that sits nearby in Warriner Hall), as well as a series of podcasts and other digital events that help to bring to life this important issue of individual, national and international ethics. To learn more about this educational programming, visit: [dutytoremember.com](http://dutytoremember.com).



*In her role as the National Coordinator of the League, Evelyn Grubb presented one of the first versions of the POW-MIA Flag to Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird in 1972. We are grateful to Keyvn Settle for unearthing the film footage from the U.S. National Archives from which this photo comes. Keyvn’s documentary film *Fruits of Peace* addresses the human dimension of the POW/MIA issue by telling the incredible story of one of the Vietnamese soldiers, Du Pham, whose unit was responsible for shooting down and capturing Newk Grubb. In 2015, Du went on a quest to the U.S. to find Captain Grubb while visiting his brother, Mai Pham. Sadly, the Pham brothers fought against each other during the Vietnam War: Du fought for North Vietnam, while Mai fought for the South. Learn more about the film at: <https://www.facebook.com/fruitsofpeace/>*

*\*Text written by Dr. Hope Elizabeth May*



Evelyn Grubb with photo of her husband, Captain Wilmer N. Grubb.

U.S. Air Force Captain Wilmer N. Grubb as he appeared in the newspaper in 1966. A nurse appears to be rendering aid to him.

