



## 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



*Cadet Newk Grubb,  
Penn State University. 1955*

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. That photo portrays a Vietnamese nurse tending to Newk’s 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 that capacity, Evelyn petitioned the United Nations, reminding member states of their legal duties towards POWs 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.

In 1970 Mary Hoff (1931-2015), mother of five, also received a telegram informing her that her husband, Navy Commander Michael G. Hoff, was shot down over Laos. Mary wanted a symbol that helped to communicate her family’s identity as a family of the Missing. Her vision was of a stark, black and white flag. Hoff worked with Newt Heasley, 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 the 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) & PFC JOHN SHELEMBBA

Beginning with the U.S. Civil War, women and families have lobbied the U.S. government to provide an accounting of 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. The DPAA has identified a number of Michiganders in recent years. In August 2021, the Governor of Michigan, Gretchen Whitmer, ordered the lowering of U.S. flags to honor Army Sgt. Jesse “Johnnie” Hill (of Highland Park, MI) and Corporal Dale Wright (of Flint, MI), both of whom went missing during the Korean War, and were finally accounted for in 2020. Pfc (Private First Class) John Shelemba of Hamtramck, MI also went missing during the Korean War and was identified in 2019. Pfc Shelemba was reported missing in action in Taejon, South Korea on July 20, 1950, and was 19 at the time. Pfc Shelemba will soon be interred in Great Lakes National Cemetery sometime in 2021. 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 2021, National POW/MIA Recognition Day falls on September 17.

Central Michigan University first observed POW/MIA National Recognition Day in 2020. 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) worked together to produce a multidimensional educational experience. The POW/MIA flag was raised and lowered on October 1, the 1 year anniversary of when the DPAA publicly announced Pfc John Shelemba’s identification. The Missing Man table was set up in Warriner Hall. We also produced a number of podcasts with the DPAA as well as the Grubb and Shelemba families. In 2021 we continue these traditions. To learn more about this programming which helps to educate our community about important issues of individual, national and international ethics, visit: [dutytoremember.com](http://dutytoremember.com).



*Above:* ROTC Cadets of CMU’s Chippewa Battalion raise the POW/MIA flag with the U.S. flag on POW/MIA Recognition Day in 2020.

*Right:* The “Missing Man” Table in Warriner Hall, Central Michigan University, October 2020.



*\*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.



A MOMENT OF NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION  
CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
SEPTEMBER 17 - OCTOBER 1, 2021

*\*The Peace Through Education Fund\**



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