

## Family Readiness Groups (FRGs)

*Submitted by Central Division Chairman April Kollmorgen*

Family Readiness Groups or FRGs are command-sponsored organizations that coexist alongside the military to assist families of servicemembers. While available all the time, the main function is usually seen during deployments. An FRG is an official military program that serves to provide information and social activities for families.

In years past, these groups were called wives clubs or family associations, but they have been structured differently now to include all family members, regardless of servicemember rank. What was once seen as a clique-y officer wives-only group is now all-inclusive. Spouses and family members hold no rank, and it's refreshing to see everyone on the same level getting along. I can tell you from personal experience, some of those officer wives are amazing people, and you just might become close friends with the Captain's wife and form an almost two-decade friendship.

Each service branch's FRG function (and name) can be a little different, due to the differences in deployments and family needs. In the Navy, for instance, the FRG is comprised of all volunteers, and a command representative and the Ombudsman would bring us any updates at one of our monthly meetings. Sometimes this was our only communication. In the other services, the experience may be a little less formal.

All FRGs are there to support families through communication, providing information on community resources, being of assistance when something inevitably breaks during deployment, and, in general, giving you all the tools you need to be ready and resilient during deployments.

### So, what can we in the American Legion Auxiliary do to support the FRGs?

- Find any local FRGs and ask what support they could use from their community. Oftentimes, they will not want to ask anyone – you have to go to them.
- Offer a free dinner at your Post home.
- Provide babysitting for a night.
- If you have a servicemember in another state, you can also reach out to them to see what support you can provide remotely. Maybe sending family care packages could be helpful. There are always military families in need, as they are generally stationed in areas that have a higher cost of living or are very remote.

Any support you can provide can be helpful. You may even find a new contact for sending care packages to deployed servicemembers too.

## FRGs Continued .....

If you have family members new to the military, definitely ask if they have FRG information. Also, point them to their base family centers that will have a wealth of information, too. If you encounter an FRG that is not very active, ask what you can do to assist them. Maybe it's a lack of fundraising to have any get-togethers during deployment. We all know how great the ALA is at fundraising. It could be a wonderful opportunity for all.

Just remember that these families, overall, are not used to asking for help. They may not even admit to themselves how tired or stressed they are. Relating to the younger generations can be a challenge, but you just might make a new friend, give them a reason to smile, or even change someone's life. And in the end, isn't that a big part of why we do what we do? We come together in The Legion Family to support our veterans and active-duty members and their families. Partnering with an FRG to support those families will be more rewarding than you realize. Those families will remember you. Their servicemembers will remember you. Imagine being deployed and knowing your family had an extra support system in place – it's so simple yet means so much.

A good resource to pass on for anyone new is the Military One Source website. Also, here is an article specific to Family Readiness that can help

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/military-basics/extended-family-friend/find-readiness-support-for-military-life/>



# THE POW/MIA EMPTY TABLE

Missing Man Table, POW/MIA Remembrance Table, Fallen Comrade Table, Fallen Soldier Table, Fallen Warrior Table, Missing Hero Table, the White Table Service are some names for the POW/MIA Empty Table Setting.

There are many variations of the POW/MIA Table, but whatever it is called and wherever it is set up, the meaning is the same. We honor those who have been Prisoners of War and those Missing in Action. When used as a ceremony, it can be a very meaningful and moving moment for the viewer as a reminder of fallen, missing or imprisoned Service Members.

Setting up a separate table to honor prisoners of war and those missing in action has been a tradition since the end of the Vietnam War. It appears across all branches of the service. Its exact origin is unknown, but it was born from the efforts of family members and veterans who have lost loved ones in war. Although there are differences, the main elements are the same. It is a way to keep those unaccounted service members in the public eye.

## Although not part of the National Security Program K-9 Corps assists our Servicemembers K-9 CORPS K9 Veterans Day - March 13th

Several heroes from history include Sgt. Stubby, the original war dog who begins his military service and becomes the most decorated military dog of World War I.; Chips, the most decorated dog in World War II; Lex, who retired with his fallen owner's family; and Cairo, the Navy Seal working dog on the bin Laden raid.

The first-time dogs officially became a part of the U.S. Armed Forces was on March 13, 1942, when the Army began training for its new War Dog Program, the "K-9 Corps.

During WWI, European forces used dogs as messengers, hauling supply carts, machine guns, medical kits, and locating wounded soldiers. In WWII, serving in various branches, dogs acted as scouts, guarding supply posts and camps, rescuing downed pilots.

The largest deployment of dogs in U.S. Military history was during the Vietnam War. Canines proved invaluable in the jungle environment of Southeast Asia, with the Military greatly refining techniques for handlers and K-9s alike. Unfortunately, fewer than 200 Military working dogs made it back home from 20,000.

Today, working dogs detect explosives and narcotics. They must graduate from the 120-day Military Working Dog Training Program to enter Military Service. After successful completion, most canines qualify for dual duty: Patrol & Sniff out explosives or Patrol & Sniff out drugs, staying with 1 duty along with their human comrade. The two form a special lifetime bond! In the DOD Community, Military Service Dogs provide crucial support by performing a range of specialized tasks from opening doors to detecting seizures. They have much better welfare thanks to the Military learning from its past mistakes. The Military provides premier state-of-the-art veterinary care and facilities.

National K9 Veterans Day, March 13th, established by Vietnam War Veteran Joe White, is a day to honor, commemorate, and raise awareness of the services and sacrifices of American Military and Working Dogs throughout history.

Check out the following for more information.  
<https://nationaltoday.com/k-9-veterans-day/>

*Respectfully submitted by Lisa Boyer, Eastern Division Chairman*

## POW/MIA Empty Table Continued

Each item including the table and chair has special significance. The table is usually set off to the side with a single chair. It is set for one symbolizing the powerlessness of the prisoner against his captors. The empty chair means the soldier is not there. The white tablecloth is a symbol of purity in the individual's response to the call for arms. An inverted wine glass shows that the fallen and missing cannot partake. Grains of salt symbolize the tears that have been shed by families. Slices of lemon on a bread plate represent the bitter fate of those lost. A single red rose standing for the blood that was shed to protect our country. A burning candle is for everlasting hope for a reunion with loved ones. As I have said before, there are variations of article that are used including a black napkin, the Bible, an American flag, yellow ribbon and other items that have significant meanings.

I have often seen the Empty Table displayed in many places, usually Legion Posts, VFW Posts and Lodges. It has appeared at many banquets and military ceremonies where I have been in attendance. It never fails to get my attention when I see it in other places such restaurants and hotels, but it surprises me more when I see the empty table displayed at Scheels or Walmart near Memorial Day. These businesses recognize the sacrifices that have been made and have created an awareness to the general public.

The POW/MIA Empty Table or whatever it is called near you is a symbol of our deep gratitude and love for those prisoners of war who have been returned or those who have not yet been returned that have paid the Ultimate Price for our Country.

<https://www.war.gov/external-content/story/Article/2776327/the-powmia-or-missing-man-table/>

<https://goatlocker.org/resources/nav/powmia.htm>

<https://vawarmemorial.org/the-missing-man-table/>

*Respectfully submitted by Deb Albers,  
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