

An American POW/MIA History

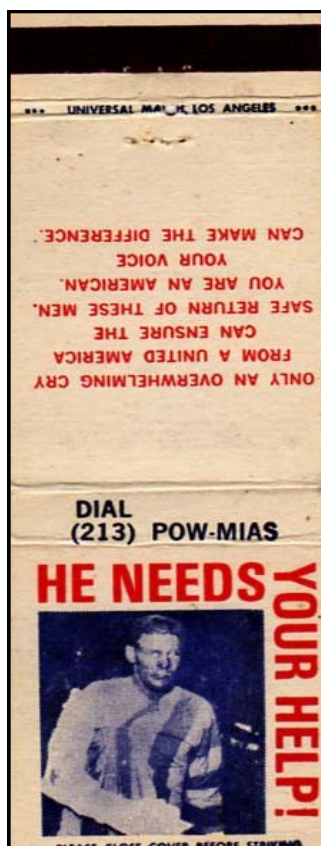
There have been American POWs and MIAs since this country's first war. If it were merely a matter of waiting out the end of the hostilities so that POWs could be repatriated and the fates of MIAs could be tracked down and determined, it wouldn't be the gut-wrenching experience that it's always proven to be. Part of war has almost always involved "dehumanizing" the enemy so that there is no question on the part of your own troops that the enemy "deserves" death and defeat. Unfortunately, one result of that process is the all too often ill treatment of those captured.

In the American Revolution (1775-1783), nearly 20,000 Americans were captured by the British. A number were hanged as "traitorous rebels." In the War of 1812 (1812-1814), another almost 20,000 Americans, mostly privateersmen, were taken prisoner and transported to England to be held in British prisons.

The War with Mexico (1846-1848) was actually started over POWs. A sizeable Mexican force crossed the Rio Grande River and ambushed an American reconnaissance patrol. Forty-seven dragoons were captured and taken into Mexico.

The POW camp at Andersonville, Georgia, during the Civil War (1861-1864) became infamous for its inhuman treatment of Union soldiers. The camp commandant was later hanged for war crimes. In all, nearly 55,000 Union and Confederate soldiers perished as POWs. This was also the first time that American women (who had passed themselves off as male soldiers) were held as POWs.

The only capture of Americans in the Spanish-American War (1898) involved 8 US sailors who were then used as a shield against further attack by the Spanish. There was such a public outcry that they were exchanged for one Spanish officer six weeks later.



World War I (1914-1918) saw 7,470 American soldiers classified as POW/MIA. Navy Lt. Edouard Izac was the first US POW of the war, captured on May 21, 1918. He suffered terribly for his many escape attempts before finally making good his escape on Oct. 6, 36 days before the end of the war. He was later awarded the Medal of Honor.

Things got much worse with World War II (1941-1945). There were some 137,000 POWs. Almost 15,000 died in captivity, with many atrocities. There were 84,436 MIAs. Some POWs liberated by the Russians at war's end ended up in Soviet gulags in Siberia. There were 8,177 MIAs and 1,012 admitted POWs in the Korean War (1950-1953), with many more atrocities.

Incredibly, there were even 343 US MIAs in the Cold War Era (1945-1991)! Then came Viet Nam (1959-1973). Today, there are still over US 2,000 MIAs.

Kenneth Butcher and three others are MIA from Grenada (1983). Desert Storm (1991) saw 52 US men and women captured or missing. All have since been accounted for. Somalia (1992-1994) resulted in 9 POWs—6 were murdered, 1 was returned, and two are still not accounted for.

We should never stop demanding closure for current MIAs—and never forget.