



Lest We Forget

Formal toasting dates back to ancient times

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By Tina Miles

Special to Soundoff!

Recently, as we bade farewell to our 40th president, Ronald Reagan; the nation witnessed traditions filled with symbolic history. Many of these steadfast traditions are associated with military events. One such tradition rich in symbolism is raising a glass at auspicious occasions in offer of a toast.



A candle is lit by Capt. James Howie, commander, Headquarters, Headquarters Detachment, in remembrance of prisoners of war (POWs) and missing in action (MIAs) comrades.

The custom of toasting goes back to ancient times when a piece of toast was placed in a goblet with meat or an alcoholic beverage. Becoming saturated, the toast sank to the bottom of the goblet. After someone challenged "Toast," others drank the goblet to get the toast. Nowadays one no longer drains the glass, however, it is improper to toast with an empty glass. Even the "charge" of the glass is scripted, wine-glasses are held waist high with the thumb and first two fingers of the right hand on the base of the stem.

At the 902nd Military Intelligence Summer Formal Dining event, held June 12 at the Key West, in Hanover, Md., the usual toasts were made. Toasts

to country, president, honored guests, etc. Then, prior to being seated for the meal, Capt. James Howie, commander, Headquarters, Headquarters Detachment, walked over to light a candle on a small table set in a place of honor to the left of the head-table. This table was set for a very special group of people who could not be present. This table symbolized America's



The table honoring fallen comrades is covered in a red tablecloth, holding a

prisoners of war and those missing in action, commonly called POW/MIAs. However, we call them brothers. Their numbers are many.

First Sgt. Fred Moore, 308th Military Intelligence Battalion, gave further explanation during the narration. The table set for one was small, symbolizing the frailty of one prisoner alone against his oppressors, covered in a white table cloth, symbolizing the purity of their intentions to respond to their country's call to arms. One red rose symbolized the love of country and countrymen that lets these comrades defend the principles of freedom, even to the point of the trials now suffered. The rose also reminds us of the families and loved ones who keep their faith while waiting.

A Bible placed on the table represented faith as our religion, whatever form that religion may take, helps us sustain our missing comrades and their families through the hardships they now pass. A black napkin stood for the emptiness left in the hearts of their families, their comrades and our circle of friendship.

The yellow candle was lit by Howie for freedom and the open arms and tears of joy, which will greet the POW's and MIA's when they are finally returned to us. It was also lit in memory of those who have not returned, as a light to guide them home.

Spilled salt on a bread-plate symbolized tears of those that wait. Next to the plate, a wine glass turned upside down reminded us that our brothers cannot toast with us.

The only chair at the table was faced away from the dining area because theirs is an unknown face, representing no one individual, but all the missing from all the wars. It also faced away symbolizes of the isolation and lack of human contact that our brothers endured.

And lest we forget, the chair is empty because they are not here. As Moore made the toast, we were asked to remember them, for surely they have not forsaken us.

Upon completion of the toast made honoring the POW/MIAs, another similar toast was offered. Attention was turned to another unusual table occupying a place of honor to the right of the head-table. It held a single place setting, a helmet, and a pair of boots. This table was set in honor of our fallen comrades. Moore said, "Those who have gone before us have paid for our right to carry on in their stead, for wars are not won, nor freedom ensured, by the living alone."

The table was covered by a red cloth, a symbol of the blood that has been shed for our country. Propped in the helmet was a small American flag, the symbol of our country for which our comrades fought and died. For 226 years, our colors have represented a nation dedicated to liberty and freedom. They have been carried to many lands, inspiring acts of valor, often demanding the ultimate sacrifice.

On the table a black flower was placed, as a sign of death, in memory of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the past; those who are making it now as we fight the current war on terrorism and those who will make it in the future. At this table there was no chair, for they will not be joining us.

The Summer Formal was a festive occasion, where prestigious Knowlton Awards were given. Sgt. 1st Class Barbara M. Elsea received the Saint Martin's Quartermaster Award and food and dancing was enjoyed by all. But prior to those festivities, glasses were raised and a toast was offered: "To the many that have made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom, our fallen comrades, lest we forget."

Editor's note: Tina Miles is the public affairs officer for the 902nd Military Intelligence Group here.