

POW/MIA DAY 2008

By: David Smith

Embry-Riddle Aero-nautical University, with a long military tradition, paid tribute to the prisoners of war (POW) and missing in action (MIA) of the armed services of the United States of America with an annual remembrance ceremony on Sept. 19, 2008.

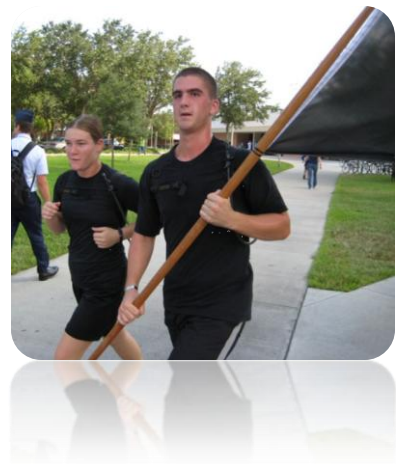
The event is a “national day of remembrance” for those who have suffered immensely in defense of liberties enjoyed in the U.S., said Justin Baier, an Air Force ROTC cadet.

The Arnold Air Society, a professional honorary support organization, coordinated the event along with the Silver Wings, a military-civilian consortium that works closely with the U.S. Air Force.

A black, cardboard, science-fair display and round dinner-table were positioned in the center of the University Center as various ROTC cadets lapped around campus toting a black POW/MIA flag.

Just below the platform, Baier and others sold commemorative bracelets for \$15 each, with proceeds headed to POW family organizations. All senior cadets wear them in an effort to prepare themselves for that possible fate.

The display offered statistics that outlined the number of POWs and MIA in every major American conflict, from the Revolution to the first Gulf War. The left flap profiled three soldiers lost in Vietnam while the right shed light on the table.



And that table, set for one, was rich with symbolic meanings.

“It is set for one to show they can’t join us, and the cloth is white to signify the purity of their sacrifice,” Baier explained. “The lone candle represents the frailty of a lone soldier, while the “black ribbon reminds us that they are gone forever.”

A lemon sat on a small saucer, signifying “the bitterness of the turmoil they’ve endured,” Baier added. A salt shaker was included to re-mind observers of “the tears they shed in captivity.”

While the fate of nearly 3000 soldiers in the Vietnam conflict is still unknown, Kirsten Wade, an Air Force ROTC cadet, explained that recent conflicts pale in comparison.

“Four thousand lost in (Iraq). That was just a day in the old wars, if you look at how many thousands have died,” Wade said.

“With the more recent conflicts, if a person comes home the tradition is to mail the bracelet back to the family,” said Mario Guerra, a second-year cadet.

On that day of remembrance and sorrow, all three cadets affirmed their belief that families will be lifted by the emotional and monetary support.

“Freshman are taught tradition, and to honor the sacrifice of those before you,” Baier said of the annual ceremony that will be greeted solemnly by many in 2009.