

Don't forget

They're the soldiers who never returned from war, their whereabouts unknown or their remains never recovered. But, as the familiar black flag reminds Americans, "You are not forgotten."

The Prisoners of War/Missing in Action flag is a familiar sight to many Americans, but its significance is increasingly lost as the years pass by.

But as the years go by since POW/MIA advocates successfully fought to bring the black flags into prominence, some Americans have forgotten their significance over the years. Many young people may have no idea what the flags represent.

The flags, and POW/MIA ceremonies, serve as a reminder of the nation's obligation to reunite the prisoners or their remains with their families. In fact, the U.S. government still devotes a great deal of time and resources in such recovery efforts.

Through September, the Joint Prisoners of War, Missing in Action Accounting Command – known as JPAC – is scheduled to deploy more than 85 investigation and recovery teams on 30 missions to 11 different countries; 60 of them to support Vietnam War POW/MIA operations.

But as the years pass by and the memories fade, so too, has the will of some to fund and support such recovery actions.

"Notice you go into various parades and towns, and the POW/MIA flags are becoming less and less visible," said Maureen Dunn, the featured speaker at a recent POW/MIA ceremony in Taunton, Mass. Dunn told the story of her husband, Navy Commander Joseph P. Dunn.

Cmdr. Dunn was in a plane that was shot down over the northeast coast of Hainan Island, China, in 1968. An immediate mission to recover him was abandoned.

"He was actually heard on the beeper," Maureen Dunn said. "There was a board sent to go closer to him and pick him up, then ordered back."

She has continued as a strong advocate for POW/MIA for the past 44 years, helping to create the POW/MIA flag back in the early 1970s as part of the National League of Families.

Cmdr. Dunn is one of 39 Massachusetts service members who have not been returned from Vietnam. Still, Massachusetts is more fortunate than other states in that regard, according to Dunn, because the commonwealth has the highest per-capita rate of returns of POW/MIAs of any state in the country.

"Why is that? Because of this. Because people continue to care," she said. "And ... it's a law that we won, that there is to be a POW flag in at least one municipal building in every city and town in the commonwealth. And the Defense Department did have a riling that all color guards were to carry a POW flag."

To this day, 1,677 Vietnam War POW/MIAs from across America remain unaccounted for.

There were 2,500 when recovery efforts started.

As Massachusetts Rep. Shaunna O'Connell said at the ceremony, "We have a solemn duty to our veterans and our current military members to never give up, to never forget, and to bring them all home no matter how long it takes, for they still wait."

These service members fought for us. As a nation, we must continue to fight for their return.

"If you don't want to fight for the POW/MIAs, then you're abandoning your soldiers, people who are fighting for your country. You can't do that," said Dennis Proulx, vice president of the Taunton Area Vietnam Veterans Association, which organizes the annual ceremony.

Meanwhile, POW/MIA Day is recognized on the third Friday of September by resolution of Congress. Communities throughout the country hold annual remembrances on that day. It is a day of remembrance and hope for the return of American prisoners of war and those still missing in action.

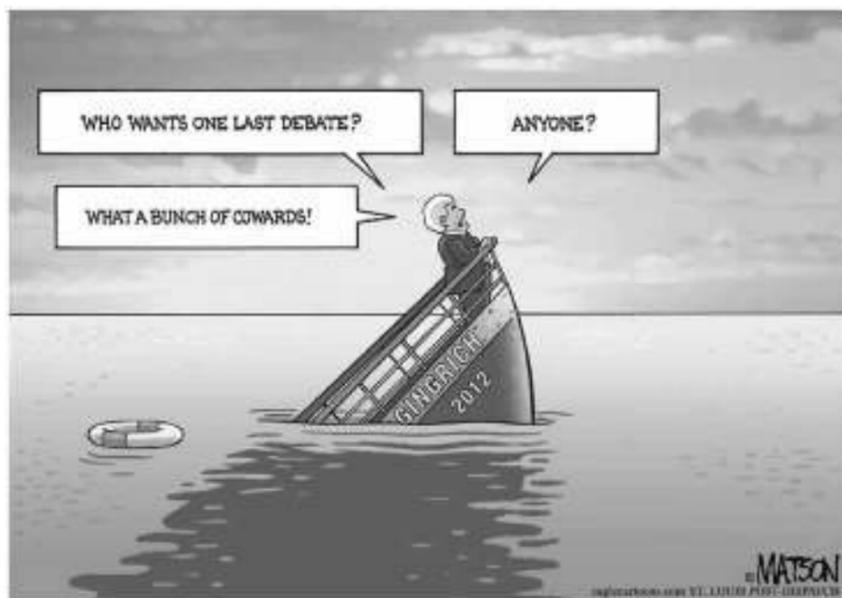
The POW/MIA ceremonies are also held to make public the efforts to return the remains of the nation's fallen servicemen and women missing of not only Vietnam but also World War II and the Korean war.

"This POW/MIA Remembrance Ceremony means a lot to me," said Vietnam Veterans of America member Donald Pearce Sr. of Taunton. "There are people from my hometown who are still missing."

The POW/MIA ceremony served as a reminder that their return is a responsibility that must continue.

This editorial first appeared in our sister paper, The Taunton Gazette.

ARTIST'S VIEW



MARCELLUS WATCH | PETER MANTIUS

Cuomo ignores threat

Days after his inauguration last January, Gov. Andrew Cuomo promised his that administration would rely on "science and the facts" to decide the future of high-volume hydrofracking to tap shale gas in New York.

He thought the phrase had a nice ring to it, and he repeated it often. Of course, the promise was purely rhetorical, which is another word for breakable. And he broke it last week when he opposed modest funding for an independent assessment of the health effects of the controversial natural gas drilling technique.

Politicians break promises all the time, but this broken promise sends a particularly ominous signal. It places New York on a path to follow the sorry example of frack-happy Pennsylvania into the dark ages where "science and the facts" about human health have been all but banished.

Cuomo should have heeded the advice of the Medical Society of New York and backed the state Assembly's move to allocate \$100,000 for the health effects study. Instead, the governor and the state Senate ignored the doctors and cut the funding from the budget.

That action catered to the pro-fracking lobby. In February, the governor was quoted as saying his decision on hydrofracking was "a couple of months away" – meaning the state Department of Environmental Conservation could begin issuing its first high-volume hydrofracking permits this summer. He didn't want to raise industry's hopes only to dash them with further study and delay.

A careful review of health effects of hydrofracking could threaten not only to delay, but also to derail, the hydrofracking train.

Recent comprehensive reviews of fracking operations in Colorado and Wyoming found they

have polluted both water and air.

While no definitive link has been established between drilling operations and human illness, a common set of health symptoms tend to occur near intense gas drilling. At least that's what the victims believe. Nosebleeds, skin rashes, intestinal problems and respiratory ailments are the most common. But cases of poisoning from barium, arsenic and other substances found in fracking flowback have turned up too.

A senior official at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta has urged further studies to confirm – or contradict – strong circumstantial evidence of links between fracking and human illness.

In Pennsylvania, people who attribute their illnesses to gas drilling have been told by state regulators that they are just plain wrong. Gov. Tom Corbett, an ardent gas drilling advocate, has sidestepped the health issue. Not one of the 30-odd members of his gas drilling task force has a background in public health.

In that vacuum, others outside government have moved in to treat the sick. In February, a non-profit group of public health experts from around the country opened a clinic in a heavily fracked area south of Pittsburgh, to treat and refer people with ailments that they believe stem from gas drilling.

The group's goal is not anti-fracking advocacy, according to one of the organizers, David R. Brown, a former supervisor of superfund sites for the CDC. Brown told me that his group's purpose is to "treat the people ... to break the train of transmission. That's what you do in any outbreak."

Cuomo or the New York State Senate aren't prepared to acknowledge or deal with any such outbreaks. Their preferred approach seems to be to

wait around for cancer clusters to develop in New York.

New York state has spent three years developing new gas drilling rules, and Albany has had its head in the sand on health issues the entire time.

In 2009, a senior EPA official urged the New York Department of Health to assume a major role beside the DEC in drafting the state's hydrofracking rules. It never happened.

A year later, the Medical Society of New York called for a moratorium on hydrofracking until adequate information was available to determine its impact on human health.

Last fall, more than 200 physicians and health care professionals signed a letter to Cuomo urging him to order a comprehensive health impact assessment of hydrofracking. The letter said that if the state DOH wasn't willing to conduct such an assessment, the governor should call on a graduate school of public health to do it. Again, nothing happened.

The fact that the DEC has spent three years writing more than 1,000 pages of rules for hydrofracking does not mean it's done a thorough job. It has not. It's been ignoring the obvious.

Due to Cuomo's lack of assertiveness, the DEC has produced a political document, not a scientific document.

The governor needs to open his eyes to a looming public health threat and reverse his position. He needs to find a new way to fund a comprehensive health impact study before one high-volume hydrofracking permit is granted.

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OTHER VIEW | PHILA. INQUIRER

Applicants shouldn't have to 'friend' bosses

Prospective employers typically ask job applicants for references. But in the age of the Internet, some want much more.

In a chilling disregard for privacy rights, some companies are requiring job seekers to turn over their Facebook passwords during the hiring process.

And in a competitive market amid a sluggish economy, many job seekers may feel that they have no choice but to share access to personal information on the popular social media site.

The disturbing practice violates a basic Internet principle: Never disclose your password.

The demand may be perfectly legal, though that's questionable.

It's a total invasion of privacy that should be prohibited.

Toward that end, some members of Congress have correctly asked the Justice Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to investigate whether the practice violates federal laws.

With access to a Facebook profile, an employer can review personal information such as a person's age, gender, sexual orientation, and religion – statuses protected under employment law.

Current law, however, may need updating, so Sens. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., say they will propose whatever measures are needed to block employers from snooping on applicants by demanding access to their social-media passwords.

Meanwhile, Facebook has warned employers not to ask job applicants for the passwords to that site. The company has threatened legal action for violating its policy against sharing passwords.

It is not surprising that employers would want to troll the Internet to check out job applicants. And no one should expect postings made in the public realm to be kept completely private.

But requiring access to passwords and other information that is not publicly available should not be a condition of employment.

Online polls: You weigh in

Recent question: Should college athletes be paid to play?

Yes 17%
No 77%
Undecided 4%

Total votes: 122

New question: Is hydrofracturing bad for the environment?

www.the-leader.com

New question No. 2: "Game of Thrones" returns to HBO this week. Will you be watching?

www.the-leader.com/entertainment

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