

Vietnam War POW Heads Pentagon POW/MIA Recognition Day Ceremony

By Rudi Williams
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Sept. 6, 2001 -- Orson G. Swindle III, who spent six years and four months as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam, is the slated keynote speaker at 11 a.m. Sept. 21 at the Pentagon National POW/MIA Recognition Day ceremony.

Swindle, a Federal Trade Commission commissioner, was shot down on Veterans Day, Nov. 11, 1966, while flying his 205th combat mission over North Vietnam. Captured and held prisoner by the North Vietnamese, he was released March 4, 1973.

He retired from the Marine Corps in 1979 as a lieutenant colonel with 20 military decorations for valor in combat, including two Silver Stars and two Bronze Star Medals, and two Purple Hearts.

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz will host the ceremony. Attendees will include former POWs, veterans, service members and family members of servicemen missing in action.

The Army is this year's ceremonial host, a duty that's rotated among the four services. The ceremony will involve military troop formations from each service, a joint color guard, a fly over and a cannon salute by the Army's Old Guard from Fort Myer, Va.

"The purpose of events at the Pentagon, local installations worldwide, veterans' posts and in communities worldwide, is to honor and commemorate the sacrifices of former POWs, missing in action servicemen and their families," said Larry Greer, spokesman for the Defense POW and Missing Personnel Office. "The president will issue a proclamation, which will also honor former POWs, MIAs and their families."

The POW/Missing Personnel Office has received hundreds of calls from military units, stateside and overseas, asking for background information on POW/Missing Personnel Recognition Day, Greer said. The office issued its annual POW/MIA poster this summer; various downloadable versions are on the [POW/MPO Web site](http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/powday/pow_rec_day_01_poster.htm) at www.dtic.mil/dpmo/powday/pow_rec_day_01_poster.htm.

The Pentagon ceremony will also honor the seven Americans and nine Vietnamese who died April 7, 2000, when their helicopter crashed in Vietnam while searching for missing Americans.

"They were the first Americans who have died in the quest to recover remains of servicemen from any conflict," Greer noted. "We have teams all over the world doing this dangerous recovery work all over the world."

Sixty sets of remains thought to be those of missing Americans have been repatriated so far this year. They include 22 from World War II, 17 from the Korean War, 20 from Southeast Asia and one from the Cold War, Greer noted.