

We're not proud of Gene Olson and members of the airport authority or their treatment of Vietnam veteran Gary Hall as well as their disdain for families of POW and MIA soldiers. Olson's letter last month referred to POW and Missing In Action soldiers as "outside groups" and the airport's recognition of them "a slippery slope." His insult went further calling the POW/MIA flag "a display."

Olson and his board quickly passed a resolution to prevent any further discussion of the issue that had more "whereas" than lights on the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Plaza. To add insult to injury toward Hall, Olson told the Vietnam veteran he could attend the December authority meeting and speak, but the issue had been resolved with passage of the resolution. Mr. Olson implied Hall would be wasting his time.

The decision by the airport commissioners comes at a time when the government is exhuming the remains of missing and unidentified military personnel killed Dec. 7, 1941, at Pearl Harbor. Newer DNA techniques have enabled the government to identify some of the dead. Their remains have been moved for burial by families in their hometowns. Thursday, Dec. 7, I once again participated in Creve Coeur's memorial ceremony honoring those killed at Pearl Harbor. As the U.S. Marine Engineers, Company "C" raised the American flag that flew next to the POW/MIA flag, I was so grateful there are some in our society who remember the fallen and don't use feeble excuses to dismiss them as simple "displays." As a reader of my column said, Olson's comparison of boy and girl scouting to POW/MIA soldiers "was the most asinine statement I ever heard." So is the airport's resolution.

I wonder if their decision might have been different if they had been around in 1944 or 1945 when Peorians William Klusendorf and Dick Reynolds were captured by the Japanese and spent the rest of World War II as Prisoners of War. Would they have been as dismissive of the POW/MIA flag when Ed Lehnhausen was declared Missing in Action after his plane disappeared during a bombing raid in Europe? Those are three of many from Peoria and central Illinois who were prisoners and/or declared MIA. There are 1,741 missing in action soldiers from the Vietnam War alone...1,741 families hoping and praying while learning Peoria airport commissioners turned their backs on their loved ones. A simple solution for the airport authority would've been to at least agree to fly the POW/MIA flag the third Friday in September each year, designated by Congress and proclaimed by every President since 1979 as National POW/MIA Recognition Day. The motto on the flag is, "You are not forgotten." But they are at General Wayne R. Downing Airport in Peoria.