

This Day in History... September 11, 2001

9/11 Terrorist Attacks And The Fate Of The Ground Zero Flag

At 8:46 a.m. on the morning of September 11, 2001, American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower of New York City's World Trade Center, changing our world forever. Before the day was over, close to 3,000 people would lose their lives, and countless heroes would be made. From that day forward, the term "9/11" would symbolize both disaster and heroics.



These stamps were issued to honor the people who lost their lives in the 9/11 attacks. The first of these went on sale just 43 days after September 11.

In all, four US passenger planes were hijacked by 19 al Qaeda terrorists. The first two crashed into the Twin Towers in New York City, the third hit the Pentagon. A fourth was taken over with the intent of flying to Washington, DC, but passengers were able to overcome hijackers and crashed the plane in a Pennsylvania field instead.

By 5 p.m. in New York, firefighters, police, and emergency workers had spent much of the day tirelessly searching for survivors. A group of firemen then noticed a US flag waving atop a nearby yacht. Seeing it as a symbol of hope for the brave workers, the three men removed the flag and its pole and raised it at Ground Zero, in the center of the relief efforts. Photographer Thomas E. Franklin knew he was witnessing something special and immediately snapped the photo that went on to grace millions of newspapers and collectibles. It's often compared to the flag raising at Iwo Jima.



The image of the flag raising at Ground Zero is often compared to the raising of the flag at Iwo Jima, one of the most enduring images of World War II.

Reportedly, the flag was later taken by officials, signed by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and George Pataki, and sent to fly aboard American ships serving in Afghanistan. It returned to America the following year and flew in various locations around New York City.

Later in 2002, the owners of the yacht from which the flag was taken wanted to donate it to the Smithsonian. However, when they received the flag, they discovered it was much larger than the one that flew above their yacht. The firefighters agreed it wasn't the same flag they had raised on September 11.

Researchers have looked at photos from later in the night of September 11 and discovered the flag was already missing from its pole by that point. Therefore, the flag that was signed and sent to Afghanistan wasn't the one that flew over Ground Zero in that famous shot. However, it did serve as inspiration to the men and women defending our freedom overseas.

For years, many were uncertain where the Ground Zero flag was. Some believed it could have been stolen, simply misplaced, or used to cover a fallen first responder. The flag's owners, among others, continued to search for this historic flag that became a symbol of hope for Americans on one of the darkest days in our history.

A major break occurred in October 2014, when the History Channel aired a special on the flag, hoping to get a lead on its whereabouts. Four days later, a man who only called himself Brian entered the Everett Fire Station in Everett, Washington, some 2,585 miles away from Ground Zero. He carried a flag in a plastic bag that he said was given to him by a widow of a 9/11 victim, and believed it might be the Ground Zero flag.

The flag was then given to a forensic scientist who ran a series of tests, paying particular attention to the dust particles. He found that the flag had the same particles as found at Ground Zero. It also had a piece of black electrical tape holding two stripes together, as the Ground Zero flag had. He tested and re-tested the flag for six months before ultimately confirming it was in fact the Ground Zero flag.

The flag was unveiled at the 9/11 Memorial Museum in New York City on the 15th anniversary of the attacks, and remains on display today.

The Heroes of 2001 Semipostal Stamp

The Heroes of 2001 Semipostal stamp raised funds to assist the families of emergency relief personnel killed or permanently disabled in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The image is based on the photo taken by photographer Thomas Franklin of three weary firefighters raising a flag over the rubble that had been the World Trade Center.

This stamp sold for 45¢, 11¢ above the one-ounce first-class postage rate. The stamp remained on sale through December 2004, with a total of 133 million being sold. During the two-plus years it was on sale, the stamp raised \$10,565,073. The money raised was given to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which would then distribute the funds to the families of emergency responders killed or disabled during the 9/11 attacks on New York and the Pentagon, and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. About 1,000 people or families were eligible to receive aid, and each received about \$10,000.



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