

This Day in History... May 15, 1963

Peace Officers Memorial Day

On May 15, 1963, the US observed its first Peace Officers Memorial Day. It's a day that pays tribute to America's local, state, and federal peace officers who have died or been injured in the line of duty.

On October 1, 1961, the 87th Congress requested President John F. Kennedy establish May 15 as a day to honor the nation's peace officers. Exactly one year later, President Kennedy signed the bill into law. The bill proclaimed that May 15 would be celebrated as Peace Officers Memorial Day, and that the week during which May 15 occurred would be Police Week.



JFK created Peace Officers Memorial Day in 1962.

The act acknowledged that “the police officers of America have worked devotedly and selflessly in behalf of the people of this nation, regardless of the peril or hazard to themselves... have safeguarded the lives and property of their fellow Americans...given our country internal freedom from fear of the violence and civil disorder that is presently affecting other nations... [and] by their patriotic service and their dedicated efforts have earned the gratitude of the Republic.”

Further, the act said it was “To pay tribute to the law enforcement officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country and to voice our appreciation for all those who currently serve on the front lines of the battle against crime.” Every year since, America's presidents have issued proclamations declaring May 15 as Peace Officers Memorial Day. In 1994, Bill Clinton ordered that US flags be flown at half-staff on that day in recognition of the observances.



This stamp was issued to honor all the firefighters, police officers, veterans, and other real-life heroes who gave their lives while serving their country.

While Americans around the country observe the day in their own communities, one of the largest gatherings occurs in Washington, DC. The first such memorial was held in 1982 and has grown and become centered around the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Wall. Opened in 1991, the 304-foot wall has the names of the 21,183 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty throughout American history. These events are generally sponsored by the National Fraternal Order of Police and overseen by the Fraternal Order of Police Memorial Committee.

Other events that are held during National Police Week include a Blue Mass, candlelight vigil, wreath laying ceremony, National Police Survivors Conference, Honor Guard competition, and the Emerald Society and Pipe Band March and Service. In an average year, some 25,000 to 40,000 officers, families, and other visitors usually attend.

Today, there are currently more than 800,000 law enforcement officers serving in 19,000 different law enforcement agencies.



This stamp was issued for the fifth anniversary of Peace Officers Memorial Day.



Pictures an 1880s police patrol wagon.



2018 stamp honoring first responders including police, paramedics, and firefighters.

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