

This Day in History... July 18, 1979

National POW/MIA Recognition Day

On July 18, 1979, the first National POW/MIA Recognition Day was observed.

Up until that time, there hadn't been a special day set aside to honor America's POW/MIAs. However, the families of more than 2,500 Vietnam War POW/MIAs began pushing for full accountability.

So in 1979, Congress and President Jimmy Carter passed resolutions proclaiming July 18 of that year to be National POW/MIA Recognition Day. A special ceremony was held at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC. The day's events included a flyover by the 1st Tactical Squadron in the missing man formation.

Similar observances were held in the years that followed. They were usually held around the same time in July, to accompany the annual meetings of the National League of POW/MIA Families. In the 1980s, former POWs began calling for the recognition day to be held on April 9, the date of the Bataan Death March of World War II. In 1988, this date was adopted as National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day.



Issued on Memorial Day 1995.

The 1984 POW/MIA Recognition Day was one of the largest to date. The ceremony was held at the White House and presided over by President Ronald Reagan. During the event, Reagan honored the returned POWs and vowed to renew the nation's commitment to accounting for as many of those still missing as possible.

In 1986, the National League of POW/MIA Families proposed that the event be held on the third Friday in September. They selected this time because it didn't have a direct connection to any specific war or convention, so it would be welcoming to all former POWs and their families.

In 1995, Congress stopped considering legislation to set aside special days such as this. So since then, every year, each president has signed an annual proclamation declaring the third Friday in September as National POW/MIA Recognition Day. Then in 1998, Congress established POW/MIA Recognition Day as part of the Defense Authorization Act. Under this legislation, this day is one of six days that government facilities are required under federal law to fly the POW/MIA flag.

Today, the states are also encouraged to declare the day and commemorate it in their own way. Special ceremonies are held around the country and the world, at military installations, on ships, in schools, in churches, and at veteran and civic organizations. One of the main goals of these events is to honor past and present POW/MIAs. It's also a day to rededicate efforts to bring them home and care for the families still waiting on their return home.

Since 1999, the POW/MIA Accounting Agency has produced an annual poster to commemorate that year's observance. The 2022 National POW/MIA Recognition day will be held on Friday, September 16.



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