

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 September 11, 2001, American Airlines Flight 11 crashed into the North Tower of New York City's World Trade Center. Before the day ended, nearly 3,000 people had been killed in the deadliest terrorist attack in US history, including people from more than 90 countries.

Nineteen al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four US passenger planes. United Airlines Flight 175 struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center at 9:03 a.m. American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon at 9:37 a.m. The passengers and crew of United Airlines Flight 93 learned of the other attacks and fought back against the hijackers. The plane crashed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at 10:03 a.m., before it could reach its intended target in Washington, DC.



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.



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.

Both World Trade Center towers collapsed that morning. First responders, construction workers, volunteers, and others soon began a long and dangerous search-and-recovery effort at the site that came to be known as Ground Zero.

Late that afternoon, three firefighters noticed an American flag flying from a yacht moored near the World Trade Center site. They took down the flag and its pole, then raised it above the rubble. Photographer Thomas E. Franklin of *The Record* of Bergen County, New Jersey, captured the moment. His photograph of the firefighters—George Johnson, Billy Eisengrein, and Dan McWilliams—quickly appeared in newspapers across the country. The image was often compared to Joe Rosenthal's famous 1945 photograph of Marines raising the flag on Iwo Jima.

The flag belonged to Shirley Dreifus and her late husband, Spiros E. Kopelakis, owners of the yacht *Star of America*. Soon after the photograph was taken, however, the original flag disappeared. A larger American flag later became associated with the image. It was signed by New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Governor George Pataki and reportedly traveled aboard US ships serving near Afghanistan. But when the yacht owners sought to donate that flag to the Smithsonian Institution in 2002, they realized it was not theirs. It was much larger than the flag taken from their yacht.

Photographs taken later on September 11 showed that the original flag had already been removed from the pole. Its disappearance became a mystery. Some wondered whether it had been stolen, misplaced amid the chaos, or used to cover the body of a fallen responder. For more than a decade, its location remained unknown.

A major lead came in 2014 after the History Channel aired a program about the missing flag. Four days later, a man calling himself Brian brought a flag in a plastic bag to the Everett Fire Department in Washington State. He said that a widow of a 9/11 victim had given it to him and that he believed it might be the long-lost Ground Zero flag.

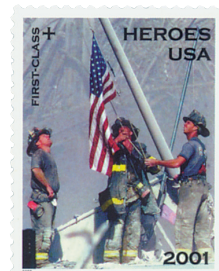
The flag underwent months of forensic examination. Investigators compared it with photographs and video from September 11. They found features that matched the original, including black electrical tape that had been used to repair two stripes. Dust and other particles also supported its connection to the World Trade Center site. The flag was authenticated and donated to the National September 11 Memorial & Museum in 2016, the 15th anniversary of the attacks. It remains on view there, near the Memorial's reflecting pools, which occupy the footprints of the Twin Towers.

The Heroes of 2001 Semipostal Stamp

The US Postal Service issued the Heroes of 2001 semipostal stamp on June 7, 2002. Its design used Thomas E. Franklin's photograph of the three firefighters raising the flag over Ground Zero.

The stamp cost 45¢. It provided 34¢ in first-class postage—the one-ounce letter rate at the time—and included an 11¢ charitable contribution, less Postal Service costs. Congress directed that the proceeds go to the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help families of emergency-relief personnel who were killed or permanently disabled while responding to the attacks.

The stamp remained on sale through December 31, 2004. About 133 million were sold, raising \$10,565,073. Roughly 1,000 eligible people or families received assistance, averaging about \$10,000 each.



This Semipostal stamp raised funds to assist the families of emergency relief personnel killed or permanently disabled in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

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