

PATRIOTIC DAYS

Sources: vfw.org and wikipedia.org

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WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY (PRESIDENTS DAY)

THIRD MONDAY IN FEBRUARY

Washington's birthday honors George Washington, the first President of the United States. It is widely known as "Presidents Day" by organizations other than the federal government in honor of other American presidents such as Abraham Lincoln (who was born February 12). While many states have renamed their state holiday "Presidents Day," the legal name of the federal holiday remains "Washington's Birthday."

Congress first honored George Washington with a federal holiday on February 22, 1879 (Washington's actual birthday). On January 1, 1971, Congress shifted the federal holiday to the third Monday in February.

The holiday honors the accomplishments of Washington, who created the first military badge of merit for the common soldier. The Purple Heart Medal (revived on Washington's 200th birthday in 1932 and bears his image) is awarded to soldiers who are injured in battle.

By the mid-1980s, the term "Presidents Day" began to appear in public, widely due to the advertising and marketing industries. Both "Presidents Day" and "Presidents' Day" are correct usages of the term.

NATIONAL VIETNAM WAR VETERANS DAY

MARCH 29

National Vietnam War Veterans Day honors a generation of men and women who served and sacrificed during the longest conflict in U.S. history. March 29 marks the anniversary of when combat forces departed South Vietnam in 1973, even though some troops remained until their final departure in 1975. According to Department of Veterans Affairs, there were 8.7 million Vietnam Era veterans, with 3.4 million deployed downrange. There were 47,434 combat deaths, 10,786 in-theater deaths, and 153,303 non-mortal woundings, which also include casualties from the ill-fated SS Mayaguez rescue attempt in 1975.

In 2017, U.S. Senators Pat Toomey, R-Pa., and Joe Donnelly, D-Ind., introduced legislation to honor Vietnam Veterans with a day on the anniversary of the withdrawal of military units from South Vietnam. President Donald Trump signed the Vietnam War Veterans Day Act on March 28, 2017, calling for U.S. flags to be flown on March 29 for those who served.

LOYALTY DAY

MAY 1

Loyalty Day is a day set aside for the reaffirmation of loyalty to the United States and for recognizing the heritage of American freedom.

Loyalty Day originally began as "Americanization Day" in 1921 as a counter to the Communists' May 1 celebration of the Russian Revolution. On May 1, 1930, 10,000 VFW members staged a rally at New York's Union Square to promote patriotism. Through a resolution adopted in 1949, May 1 evolved into Loyalty Day. Observances began on April 28, 1950, and culminated May 1, when more than five million people across the nation held rallies. In New York City, more than 100,000 people rallied for America. In 1958, Congress enacted Public Law 529 proclaiming Loyalty Day a permanent fixture on the nation's calendar.

V-E DAY (VICTORY IN EUROPE DAY)

MAY 8

Victory in Europe Day (commonly known as V-E Day), marks the formal acceptance by the Allies of World War II of Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender of its armed forces, therefore marking the end of World War II.

On April 30, Adolf Hitler, the Nazi leader, committed suicide during the Battle of Berlin. Germany's surrender, therefore, was authorized by his successor, Reichspräsident Karl Dönitz. The act of military surrender was signed on May 7 in Reims, France and on May 8 in Berlin, Germany.

Upon defeat of Germany (Italy having already surrendered), cheers could be heard throughout the world. In the United States, the victory happened on President Harry Truman's 61st birthday, and massive celebrations took place in Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami and New York.

ARMED FORCES DAY

THIRD SATURDAY IN MAY

Armed Forces Day is a day to honor Americans currently serving in the five branches of the U.S. military as well as the National Guard and Reserve units.

Led by the effort of President Harry S. Truman to establish a single day for Americans to thank the nation's military members for their service to our country, Armed Forces Day was created on August 31, 1949, following the unification of the armed forces under the U.S. Department of Defense. First observed on May 20, 1950, the day was designed to replace separate Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard Days, but the separate days are still observed, particularly within their respective services.

MEMORIAL DAY

MAY 30 (TRADITIONAL); OBSERVED LAST MONDAY IN MAY

Memorial Day is a day to honor the men and women who died while serving in America's Armed Forces.

Originally called "Decoration Day," it originated after the Civil War to commemorate those who died in the war by decorating their graves. It was declared "Memorial Day" by federal law in 1967, by which time the remembrance had been extended to honor all Americans who died while serving in America's armed forces. Many people celebrate Memorial Day by visiting cemeteries and memorials; volunteers place American flags on every grave in national cemeteries.

Memorial Day, May 30 (traditional), is a day sacred to all war veterans. America's collective consciousness demands that all citizens be reminded of the deaths of their fellow countrymen. By honoring the nation's war dead, we preserve their memory, and thus their service and sacrifice. All U.S. flags should be displayed at half-staff during the morning hours. At noon, they should be raised back to full-staff.

FLAG DAY

JUNE 14

Flag Day is June 14 and celebrates the adoption of the flag the official symbol for the United States: our Stars and Stripes. This day was first recognized by Congress on June 14, 1777, which became known as Flag Day.

The U.S. flag has 13 stripes: seven red and six white. A blue field with 50 stars is located next to the staff in the upper left corner of the flag. It extends from the top to the lower edge of the fourth red stripe. The stars are arranged in alternating rows of six and five representing the 50 states of the United States. The stars do not represent any given state.

The colors used in the flag give special meaning to the flag: Red for valor and zeal; white for hope and cleanliness of life; and blue -- the color of heaven -- for reverence and loyalty.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

JULY 4

Independence Day, commonly known as the Fourth of July or July Fourth, commemorates the adoption of the Declaration of Independence from Great Britain.

On July 4, 1776, the signers of the Declaration of Independence asserted that all are “created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” With these words, our forefathers formed a new nation and put forth a vision of liberty and democracy that would forever alter history. Every Fourth of July, Americans celebrate this pivotal moment in our history, which set into motion the development of a land of freedom and opportunity unequalled in the world.

PATRIOT DAY

SEPTEMBER 11

Patriot Day, also known as the National Day of Service and Remembrance, occurs on September 11 each year in memory of those killed during the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Those we lost September 11, 2001, will forever hold a cherished place in our hearts and in the history of our nation. By a joint resolution approved December 18, 2001, (Public Law 107-89), Congress authorized the President to designate September 11 of each year as “Patriot Day” to perpetuate the memory of those who perished in the attack on America, and to pursue peace and justice in the world and security at home. Appropriate ceremonies and activities include a moment of silence beginning at 8:46 a.m. EDT, remembrance services and candlelight vigils. Flags should be flown at half-staff on Patriot Day.

CONSTITUTION DAY AND CITIZENSHIP DAY

SEPTEMBER 17

This day commemorates the formation and signing of the U.S. Constitution on September 17, 1787 by 39 delegates to the Constitutional Convention. This document established the framework of our government and the rights and freedoms that “We the People” enjoy today.

In 1940, Congress designated the third Sunday in May as “I am an American Day.” In 1944, “I am an American Day” was promoted by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. On February 29, 1952, Congress moved “I am an American Day” observation to September 17 and renamed it “Citizenship Day.” In 2004, Congress renamed the holiday “Constitution Day and Citizenship Day” and mandated that all publicly-funded educational institutions and all federal agencies provide educational programming on the history of the American Constitution on this day.

POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY

THIRD FRIDAY IN SEPTEMBER

POW/MIA Recognition Day honors the commitments and the sacrifices made by our nation’s prisoners of war and those who are still missing in action.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day is one of the six days specified by law on which the black POW/MIA flag shall be flown over federal facilities and cemeteries, post offices and military installations. By custom, it is on the third Friday in September.

GOLD STAR MOTHER'S/FAMILY'S DAY

LAST SUNDAY IN SEPTEMBER

Gold Star Mother's/Family's Day honors mothers and families who have lost a service member in the line of duty or in support of military activities.

The name comes from the custom of families hanging Service Flags in the window of their homes. The Service Flag has a star for each family member in the armed forces. A blue star represents a family member in active-duty service, a silver star represents a family member wounded or injured in a war zone and a gold star represents a family member killed during active-duty and stands for sacrifice made for honor and freedom.

The American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. was founded shortly after World War I by Grace Darling Seibold, who lost her son, George Vaughn Seibold, during the war. Gold Star Mothers are often socially active, but are non-political. Gold Star Mother's Day was designated by Congress on June 23, 1936.

In September 2012, President Barack Obama rededicated the last Sunday in September as "Gold Star Mother's and Family's Day."

VETERANS DAY

NOVEMBER 11

Veterans Day is an opportunity to publicly commemorate the contributions of living veterans.

Originally called Armistice Day, it officially received its name in America in 1926 through a congressional resolution. It became a national holiday 12 years later by similar congressional action.

If World War I had truly been "the war to end all wars," November 11 might be still called Armistice Day. Realizing that peace was equally preserved by veterans of World War II and Korea, Congress decided to make the day an occasion to honor all those who have served America. In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a bill proclaiming November 11 as Veterans Day. (The first Veterans Day parade took place in 1953 in Emporia, Kansas.)

A law passed in 1968 changed the national commemoration of Veterans Day to the fourth Monday in October. It soon became apparent, however, that November 11 was a date of historic significance to many Americans. Therefore, in 1978 Congress returned the observance to its traditional date.

PEARL HARBOR DAY

DECEMBER 7

On the morning of December 7, 1941, Japanese bombers staged a surprise attack on U.S. military forces in Hawaii. In a devastating defeat, the United States suffered 2,403 casualties and destruction or damage to nearly 20 American naval vessels, including eight battleships and more than 300 airplanes. Japanese losses were less than 100 personnel, 29 planes, and five midget submarines.

The day after the attack, before a joint session of Congress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress for a declaration of war against Japan. President Roosevelt's message conveyed the national outrage over the Pearl Harbor attack by pronouncing December 7, 1941 "a date which will live in infamy."

FDR was furious at Japan's confidence in their "inevitable triumph" of the United States. On December 8, 1941, the United States declared war against Japan; on December 11, Germany and Italy declared war against the United States.

Today, the USS Arizona Memorial on the island of Oahu honors the lives lost on the day of the attack. Visitors to the memorial reach it via boats from the naval base at Pearl Harbor. Although December 7 is known as Pearl Harbor Day, it is not considered a federal holiday in the United States.