

POW-MIA flag creator passes away in Orange Park

ORANGE PARK, Fla. - The woman behind the POW-MIA flag, a recognizable symbol of hope and comfort for families of men and women who have gone to war and are still unaccounted for, died at the age of 84 Tuesday.

Mary Hoff, who came up with the idea for the flag nearly 50 years ago, lived a majority of her life in Orange Park and leaves behind a lasting legacy. The idea for the flag came to Hoff in the early 1970s, not long after her husband, a naval aviator, was reported missing in action. She wanted to create a symbol to honor and remember members of the military, like her husband, who were never found. Her son, Joe Hoff, said it is an honor knowing that her legacy will always live on.

Joe Hoff said the flag started out as a banner that hung on his family's door. His sister still has the banner. Now, the flag flies over many government buildings, is on pins like the one Joe Hoff wears and is flown by many throughout the year.

"A rest stop, there it is. I think it's really awesome when I see how it affects just individuals, how coworkers have come to me when they hear the story, asked me why I wear the bracelet, and then I get to know what it means to them," Joe Hoff said.



Joe Hoff said that after his father was shot down, his mother wanted to act. She helped design the flag, saying that she wanted it to be black and white, something Joe Hoff said is likely because she wanted it to be reserved, much like her personality. He said hearing how much the flag means to people is something his family takes pride in. "I did not serve in the military so I do not know what they are going through. I tried to take pride in what my mom accomplished and what my dad sacrificed. And I try to live a certain way to honor that," Joe Hoff said.

He said he even saw the flag on a car hood at a gas station recently. He said he hopes people keep in their memory those that came back and those who are still missing. [Mary Hoff]

"It's extremely important that we remember what people have done as a society, as a country and as a human race. All of us, we need to remember what people have sacrificed so that we can learn from that and move forward to a better place for everyone," Joe Hoff said. Hoff said that especially on a day like Veterans Day, he and his family have a lot of pride that at least a small symbol created by his mother can provide a little bit of comfort for families whose loved ones are still unaccounted for.



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