

Ceremonial Flag Retirement

Final Tribute Ceremony prior to the Burning Ceremony

Only one flag should be used in the ceremony, which is representative of all the flags to be burned in the service. The remainder of the flags collected should be incinerated. A corporate, government or military incinerator, or furnace can usually be found for this purpose.

The ceremony involves two color guards, one for the flag currently in use and a special color guard for the flag to be retired from service. Of course, this may be adapted if conditions necessitate.

Just before sunset the flag which has been flying all day is retired in the normal ceremonial procedure for that location-or group.

The color guard responsible for the flag receiving the final tribute moves to front and center. The leader should present this color guard with the flag which has been selected for its final tribute and subsequent destruction. The leader should instruct the color guard to "post the colors."

(when the flag has been secured at the top of the pole)

Leader: This flag has served its nation well and long. It has worn to a condition in which it should no longer be used to represent the nation."

This flag represents all of 'the flags collected and being retired from service today. The honor we show here this evening for this one flag, we are showing for all of the flags, even those not physically here.

The caller should:

- call the group to attention;
- order a salute;
- lead the entire group in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag;
- order the flag retired by the colored guard.
- Slowly and ceremoniously lower and then respectfully fold the flag in the customary triangle.
- Deliver the flag to the leader and then dismiss the group.

Preparation for the Burning Ceremony:

These preparations are done after the final lowering of the colors. Cut most of the threads holding all the stripes together. This makes separating them much easier. Refold flag into the tricorn, place 2 tablespoons of rubbing alcohol in a Zip-Loc bag, and place the flag in the bag at least 2 hours prior to the ceremony. Do not use more than the 2 tablespoons of alcohol. The alcohol helps the burning and gives off a nice blue flame. Make sure that you completely explain that the way to retire or dispose of a worn out US flag is by burning. This is Federal law. Also explain the difference between retiring a flag by burning and desecrating a flag by burning. You don't want girls going home and telling their parents that they spent their meeting burning a US flag and giving the wrong impression.

It is important that the fire be sizable-preferably having burnt down to a bed of red hot coals to avoid bits of the flag being carried off by a roaring fire yet be of sufficient intensity to ensure complete burning of the flag.

Burning Ceremony

Narrator: I have often stopped to look at our Flag rippling in the breeze from a flag staff atop a tall building and marveled at it's beauty, with it's 13 stripes of Red and it's Stars in a field of Blue.

I often wondered why these colors were chosen, and I find that Red is a symbol of Bravery, White is a symbol of Purity, and Blue is a symbol of Love and Devotion.

The Cloth of which our Flag is made is made up of millions of threads and stitched, and all bound together and each doing its part, it makes the background for our Flag.

In the same way our Country is made up of millions of individuals, with different Religious beliefs, different colors and creeds, but all bound together in the common cause to see that Liberty and Justice prevails in this Country of ours.

When looking at our flag, I can understand how proud of it Francis Scott Key was when he wrote our National Anthem. He had gone over to a British battle ship anchored in Baltimore Harbor to intercede for the release of a friend of his held captive by the British. When he walked into the British Captain's cabin he overheard the plans the British were making to assault Fort McHenry that night. The British Captain agreed to release Key's friend on the condition that Francis Scott Key remain overnight aboard the ship so that he could not tip off the plans for the assault.

As darkness was closing in, Francis Scott Key was on the deck of the ship and the last thing he saw was Old Glory proudly floating above Fort McHenry. During the night the British made a terrific assault on Fort McHenry and Francis Scott Key had his doubts as to whether the Fort could stand during the night. As dawn was breaking, Francis Scott Key walked out onto the deck of the ship and the first thing that met his gaze was Old Glory still proudly floating above the Fort, and the words of our National Anthem, The Star Spangled Banner, came to him at this time.

Please join me in our Pledge of Allegiance.

This flag has served us well, but the weather has taken it's toll. Tomorrow a fresh new flag will fly in it's place, to carry on the honor and dignity of "Old Glory" which flew many years ago. To the burial fire we add ...

REDWOOD: to remind us of the red-blooded Americans who fought and died to build our nation under this flag.

OAK: for rugged strength that carried the flag across this nation and today reaches for the stars.

CEDAR: to protect us from pestilence and corruption and preserve our American way of life.

WALNUT: to remind us of the rich soil, the beautiful countryside and the fruitful brotherhood founded by our ancestors.

Remember as you look at the Flag, it is the symbol of our nation, it is red because of human sacrifice; blue because of the true blue loyalty of its defenders; and white symbolizes liberty - our land of the free. The stars are symbols of the united efforts and hope in the hearts of the many people striving to keep America great.

Caller: (The caller approaches the patrol leader and says) We wish to present a number of unserviceable Flags of our County for inspection and disposal.

Patrol Leader: (To the Color Guard) Advance with your detail and present the Flags for disposal and inspection.

Caller: Girl Scouts attention! Color Guard attention! Color Guard advance!

The Color Guard advances to the position of the patrol leader.

Flag Bearer: (To the patrol leader) We present these unserviceable Flags for your inspection.

Patrol Leader: (To the Flag Bearer) Is the present condition of these Flags the result of their usual service as the Emblem of our Country?

Flag Bearer: (To the patrol leader) These Flags have become faded and worn over time while flying over our camp (meetings, etc.)

Patrol Leader: (To the Flag Bearer) Present these Flags to the Co-leader for her inspection.

Caller: (To the Color Guard) About face! Color Guard advance!

The Color Guard advances to the position of the co-leader.

Flag Bearer: (To the co-leader) We present these Flags which have been inspected by the Patrol Leader, for your further inspection.

Co-leader: (To the Flag Bearer) Have any of these Flags served any other purpose?

Flag Bearer: (To the co-leader) Some of these Flags have been displayed in various public places.

Co-leader: (To the Flag Bearer) Present them to the Leader for final inspection and fitting disposal.

Caller: (To the Color Guard) About face! Color Guard advance!

The Color Guard advances to the position of the leader.

Flag Bearer: (To the leader) We have the honor to present for final inspection and proper disposal these Flags of our Country.

Leader: (To the Flag Bearer) Have these flags been inspected by your Patrol Leader and the Co-leader?

Flag Bearer: They have.

Leader: (To the co-leader) What does your inspection show and what do you recommend?

Co-leader: (To the leader) Since these Flags have become unserviceable in a worthy cause, I recommend that they be honorably retired from further service."

Leader: (To the Patrol Leader) What does your inspection show and what do you recommend?

Patrol Leader: (To the leader) Since these Flags have become faded and worn in a tribute of service and love, I also recommend that they be fittingly destroyed.

Leader: (To the group) We have presented here these Flags of our Country which have been inspected and condemned as unserviceable. They have reached their present state in a proper service of tribute, memory and love.

A Flag may be a flimsy bit of printed gauze, or a beautiful banner of finest silk. Its intrinsic value may be trifling or great; but its real value is beyond price, for it is a precious symbol of all that we and our comrades have worked for and lived for, and died for - a free Nation of free men, true to the faith of the past, devoted to the ideals and practice of Justice, Freedom and Democracy.

Let these faded Flags of our Country be retired and destroyed with respectful and honorable rites and their places be taken by bright new Flags of the same size and kind.

Patrol Leader, assemble the Color Guard, escort the detail bearing the Flags and destroy these Flags by burning. Girl Scouts shall stand at attention.

Leader: The leader cuts the field of blue from the flag and gives it to the Patrol Leader to hold.

Co-Leader: The co-leader cuts each stripe from the "whole" and lays each piece, one at a time, across the flames. As she does this, the Leader and Patrol leader say what each stripe stands for.

Leader: (For the first stripe) The thirteen stripes stand for the thirteen original colonies which are:

Delaware
Pennsylvania
New Jersey
Georgia
Connecticut
Massachusetts
Maryland
South Carolina
New Hampshire
Virginia
New York
North Carolina, and
Rhode Island

Patrol Leader: (For the second stripe) The white stands for purity.

Leader: (For the third stripe) The red stands for courage.

Patrol Leader: (For the fourth stripe) Give me liberty or give me death.

Leader: (For the fifth stripe) One if by land, two if by sea.

Patrol Leader: (For the sixth stripe) We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution on the United States of America.

Leader: (For the seventh stripe) We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Patrol Leader: (For the eighth stripe) Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

Leader: (For the ninth stripe) Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or press.

Patrol Leader: (For the tenth stripe) Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Leader: (For the eleventh stripe) The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state because they are female.

Patrol Leader: (For the twelfth stripe) Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.

Leader: (For the thirteenth stripe) One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.

After all the stripes have been burned, the field of blue is laid on the fire - all are silent until the entire piece burns to ash.

Out of respect, nothing should ever be added to the ceremonial fire after the Flag has been retired.

The ceremony ends with everyone departing in silence.

After the ashes have cooled, they should be buried.

Please remember, this is a very solemn ceremony and should be done with the utmost respect and reverence for the flag to be retired.

Compiled and arranged by:

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