



FLAG RETIREMENTS

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PACK 729

August 14, 2019

Preface

After being a scout for fourteen years and then serving youth for another fifteen (and counting), it became time to impart knowledge back on those whom I would entrust to continue the journey. While Americanism has been and continues to be a strong part of Boy Scouts of America through Cub Scouts, Scouts BSA, Venturing, and Exploring, the observance and proper respect for the Flag is an essential element. It is fitting that we as leaders have developed an open relationship with our children and youth so that we can have these conversations and lessons in a supportive and caring environment.

It is my hope and faith that these lessons continue in such a manner that they outweigh the constant barrage of negativity around concepts others choose to be ignorant and obtuse about. For it is our primary purpose as leaders of these youth to provide them understanding, insight, and experience in such a manner that they can learn, understand, and decide themselves how best to use that information.

Chances are you will not see the ramifications of your actions for many years. In fact, you may never see the results at all. But that should never stop you from doing your best at delivering meaningful, impactful, and impartial knowledge to future generations of leaders.

"The spirit is there in every boy; it has to be discovered and brought to light".

~ Baden Powell

Preparations

Putting on a flag retirement ceremony does not have to be complicated or a “complete” production. There is a difference between functional and theatrical. Once the Pack has determined why it is performing the retirement, planning out the actions that need to happen becomes easier.

It is typical in our Pack for flag retirements to be done at Family Camp, both in the spring and in the fall. We do them so that we give the kids exposure to proper etiquette, allow them to practice their patriotism and respect, and to give them a forum to ask questions to a topic rarely brought up outside of the Scouting program.

1. Staff

Decide who is going to be a part of the flag retirement. You will need help.

The quantity and speed at which you want the ceremony to go often dictates how many people you should have help. Some people can help be a part of the ceremony and others can help by collecting flags and preparing them for retirement.

Preparing the flags mean they need to be folded neatly and have their grommets cut off. The grommets need to be strung on a line of metal that will not melt in the hot fire. Typically, we have used a metal coat hanger, which works extremely well for volume ceremonies. All Scouts can help fold flags and they also can earn rank requirements through this participation. If you want them to be as neatly folded as possible, I'd suggest Bears and Webelos handle this task as part of a den meeting.

I would often engage a few parents to help prepare and tend to the fire. Fire is a huge draw for kids, and we want this to be safe for all. These parents would make sure that enough wood was gathered, safety tools are set up, and water buckets are on hand. We don't teach fire building as part of rank until Webelos, so you are really limited in the number of Cub Scouts that can help with the fire.

You will also want to get some people who can participate in the ceremony itself. Whether it is reading a part of the script, placing a strip of the flag on the fire to retire, or being part of the honor guard, there is plenty of places to include all Cub Scouts, siblings, guests, and other visitors in the ceremony itself.

Also remember, that it is your duty to keep the tradition alive. Therefore, having an assistant who you can train, engage, and make comfortable performing retirements is a nice addition to your staff.

2. Location

Determine where the retirement is going to take place. You will need seating, a large enough fire pit for the flags you must retire, and access to safety equipment should something go wrong. Often a campfire ring is enough to perform the ceremony, but there is nothing to say it cannot be done in a fireplace, burn barrel, or another contained device. If you are doing this as a den and not the pack, then there is a lesser need for space.

Locally, LLELA has plenty of open space to build a retirement ceremony. Sycamore Bend has a concrete fire pit that is wide and deep. The fire ring at Hills & Hollows has been used many times to retire flags, as well as the fireplace in the building. All BSA camps typically have an open fire ring that can easily serve the purpose. You can also do this in a fire pit in your back yard or in the fireplace in an adult's home.

The biggest problem in Texas is weather. You must be conscious that the location you are using does not have strong cross winds that would blow ash. Flags often burn fast and hot, creating some residual ash. There is also the concern during extreme drought with dry brush and canopies. Make sure you have cleared your burn with the local authorities if necessary and that you have appropriate burn permits. You will also need to make sure there is not an active burn ban for your area.

3. Program

Design your program around the typical meeting agenda. Have an opening and closing. Make sure there is time for questions and answers for the youth, parents, and visitors. If you are retiring flags outside of the program structure due to volume, ensure that there is plenty of time for people to leave before you continue the retirements. You should plan for it to last no more than 30 minutes. Leave plenty of time for questions and answer for the kids (especially the younger ones). You can also include a giveback section to your program where grommets have been converted into a memento. This memento would be passed back to the service members who attended as a "Thank You" for everything they have done in service to that flag. The key here is that there is no specific program you must follow, so long as the entire program is done with respect.

Ensure that all Scouts attend in full uniform. Avoid any dangling items that could easily ignite. Any military guests should be encouraged to wear their uniform as designated by their branch of service.

At the end of this document there are several versions of flag retirement ceremonies to get you started.

Safety

Prepare your fire ring to not burn any ground or endanger foliage nearby. Ensure it is not too close to any building or structure. Place water buckets near the fire ring and preferably a hose. Have some fires extinguishers nearby. You will need a shovel to safely eliminate the fire once complete.

Clear around your fire pit enough area for the ceremony. And plan on where the smoke will travel so that the audience and participants can be out of the travel path.

Be prepared for medical issues. A fire blanket is a nice thing to have in addition to your medical first aid kit. Do not forget eye wash. Ensure that your staff understands emergency plans in case of a severe burn. Remember, we are working with highly flammable objects and are engaging the fire at a minimal distance.

Take note that flags made of nylon ignite very quickly, burn very hot, and release innocuous gases as they burn. Subsequently the fire should be placed at a distance so that the audience is out of the primary smoke path after placing these flags onto the fire. Also be aware that it is illegal to burn nylon in some states and municipalities, so always check current safety regulations.

[When in doubt or to ensure proper scouting procedures, consult the Guide to Safe Scouting:](#)

<https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/toc/>

Public Relations

If you are doing this retirement for the public, decide what you want to allow or not allow. Pictures are often misinterpreted on social media because that is what the poster wants to happen. We are in a click happy society, so in order to protect the kids the Pack does not allow the posting of flag retirement pictures on our social media pages. We have allowed people to take pictures for personal use, but we have always stated during the welcome section of the ceremony our stance on the matter.

Make sure you invite local police, fire, and emergency service personnel to participate, especially if the ceremony is open to the public. It is a great opportunity to engage and be a part of the community. You can also invite your local city council, mayor, governor, state representative, or other elected official.

Acquiring Flags

Once a public announcement is made, be prepared to accept more flags from the public. There are very few places that do flag retirements so many will use it as an opportunity to pass along their worn flags.

I would also highly encourage reaching out to the school district, city, fire departments, and other civic institutions to find out if they have any flags that need retired. You'll find that many forget they have some stored that need taken care of.

Longhorn Council also has a stash of flags and typically is sitting on several hundred that need retired. Sometime the Council Scout Shop will ask for a unit to retire flags that they have received from the public.

Your local American Legion and VFW Post will also collect flags that need retired.

Cleanup and Disposal

Ensure all flag material is thoroughly burnt by stirring with a long stick. The flag grommets should be removed from the fire pit once cold. Ashes should be collected and ensured that they are out cold.

Ashes can be buried in a garden as a fertilizer or discarded in the waste can. If in the wilderness, ensure proper spreading to reduce the risk of re-ignition.

It may be possible to collect and recycle the polyester and nylon material into new material.

Always remember to follow Leave No Trace:

- Remove all trash
- Sweep all ash and dust
- Recycle any containers
- Clean and return borrowed equipment

CEREMONIES: OPENINGS

GENERAL OPENING #1

(This opening for a flag on a pole)

SPEAKER: “We are drawn here together in the sight of God to pay our last respects to this symbol of our great nation, "America", the land of the free and the home of the brave. The US Flag Code reads; "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning." The Boy Scouts of America recommends, "When the national flag is worn beyond repair, burn it thoroughly and completely on a modest, but blazing fire. This should be done in a simple manner with dignity and respect. Be sure the flag is reduced to ashes unrecognizable as a former flag." In keeping with the law of our land and the recommendations of our organization, we present to you, this United States Flag, the symbol of our great nation, which has served its useful life as a symbol of freedom and our country, for retirement.”

Ask the audience for silence and call for the colors

SPEAKER: “Color Guard... present the Colors.”

The Color Guard, in full uniform, will march forward with the "Old Flag" attached to a flagpole, flag bearer in the center with one guard in front, and one guard in back. They are to come up the aisle, from the rear of the area.

As the flag approaches the view of the first person in the audience...

SPEAKER: “Scouts... Hand Salute One.”

Everyone is to remain saluting until the Color Guard crosses behind the fire (in front of the MC) and lines up behind the flag stand.

SPEAKER: “Post the Colors.”

The Flag Bearer will insert the flag into the flag stand, and all three will then step back and salute the flag.

SPEAKER: “Two.”

[This ceremony continues nicely with "Voice of the Flag" on the next page.]

GENERAL OPENING #2

(This opening for a folded flag)

SPEAKER: “We are drawn here together in the sight of God to pay our last respects to this symbol of our great nation, "America", the land of the free and the home of the brave. The US Flag Code reads; "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning." The Boy Scouts of America recommends, "When the national flag is worn beyond repair, burn it thoroughly and completely on a modest, but blazing fire. This should be done in a simple manner with dignity and respect. Be sure the flag is reduced to ashes unrecognizable as a former flag." In keeping with the law of our land and the recommendations of our organization, we present to you, this United States Flag, the symbol of our great nation, which has served its useful life as a symbol of freedom and our country, for retirement.”

Ask the audience for silence and call for the colors

SPEAKER: “Color Guard... present the Colors.”

The Color Guard, in full uniform, will march forward with the "Old Flag" folded in a triangle and carried like a football, flag bearer in the center with one guard in front, and one guard in back. They are to come up the aisle, from the rear of the area. The color guard come to a stop at the front center and faces the audience. They then unfold the flag until it is just folded in half lengthwise. The blue field should be to the audience's left.

SPEAKER: “Scouts... Hand Salute One.”

Remember to not make the salute too long, and don't salute while singing.

The color guard snaps the flag open.

SPEAKER: “Two.”

[This ceremony continues nicely with "Voice of the Flag" on the next page.]

CEREMONIES: PROGRAMS

VOICE OF THE FLAG

Voice of the Flag: "I am your Flag. I was born on June 14, 1777. I am more than just a piece of cloth shaped into a colorful design; I am the silent sentinel of freedom for the greatest sovereign nation on earth. I am the inspiration for which America patriots gave their lives and fortunes, I am the emblem of America.

I have led your sons into battle from Valley Forge to Vietnam. I have been there though the Civil War, two world wars, at Gettysburg, Flanders, Korea, the Gulf War, all of them. I was there with George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Teddy Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and I here with you now.

I have flown through Peace and War. Through strife and Prosperity, and amidst it all, I have always been respected. My red stripes symbolize the blood spilled in defense of this glorious nation. My white stripes, the burning tears shed by Americans who lost their sons in battle. My blue field represents God's Heaven under which I fly, and my stars, clustered together, unify the fifty states as one for God and Country.

I am "Old Glory" and I proudly wave on high. Honor me, respect me, and defend me with your lives. Never let our enemies tear me down from my lofty position, lest I never return. Keep alight the fires of patriotism, strive earnestly for the spirit of democracy, and keep me always as a symbol of freedom, liberty, and peace in our country. When comes the time when I am old and faded, do not let me fly in disrepair, rather retire me from my duties only to replace me with a new flag so that I may continue to symbolize our country. With this, renew your commitment to what I stand for and pledge your allegiance to me one final time:"

SPEAKER: "Scouts... Hand Salute One!"

To the audience: "Please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance:"

ALL PRESENT: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic, for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and Justice for all."

SPEAKER: "Two."

Second Voice: "As you can see, this banner of Freedom before you is worn, tattered, and soiled from use and age. Her broad stripes are no longer a fiery red & pure white, but faded and worn out. The stars and blue background are no longer vivid reminders of our blue skies and great land, of the purity, vigilance, and justice she should represent. She has flown proudly over the years and has done her job well, but now she must be replaced with a new flag to properly represent this great Nation of ours."

If retiring from a flagpole:

SPEAKER: "Color Guard, Remove Colors."

At this time the Color Guard is to step forward and remove the flag from the Flag Stand. They will then step back and fold the flag in the customary manner. They are to then step back and stand at attention with the Flag Bearer holding the flag in front of him, palms up.

SPEAKER: "Color Guard, Retire the Colors."

At this time the Color Guard is to march over to the fire, unfold the flag, and present it to the audience in standard display form, one Guard Standing behind and to the right of the flag, and the other two holding each end of the flag for display.

Third Voice: "The flag of our Nation should always be a strong, vivid symbol of our land and fly brightly in our minds. Our flag is a symbol of our people, our freedom, and our strength. So, it is now that I commit this flag, which no longer can fulfill these duties to the fire so that we may replace it with a new flag to properly symbolize our Nation. May the spirit of this flag be born again in the new flag we will now fly."

SPEAKER: "Scouts... Hand Salute One!"

At this time the Color Guard will turn the flag sideways and gently drop it into the fire, folding the ends in toward the middle of the flame. The third Guard will use a long stick to then "stir the ashes" so that it will not be possible to recognize the ashes as a flag. They will then step back from the fire, stand at attention, and salute the flag.

SPEAKER: "Two."

SPEAKER: "Color Guard... Prepare the Colors."

At this time, the Color Guard will march over to where the "new" flag Bearer is. The New Flag Bearer will hand the new flag to the Color Guard Flag Bearer and step back. The Color Guard will then march back to where they were standing behind the flag stand and stand at attention:

SPEAKER: "Color Guard... Present Colors. Scouts... Hand Salute One!"

The Color Guard will then unfold the flag, remove the pole from the stand and attach it to the pole. They will then stand at attention, presenting the colors.

SPEAKER: "Please join me and welcoming this new flag by once again pledging our allegiance to it:"

ALL PRESENT: "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic, for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and Justice for all."

SPEAKER: “Two. Color Guard, withdraw the colors, audience please withdraw, in silence, to your campsites behind the flag and reflect upon this evening’s ceremony and the recent events that have inflicted our country and the people of the world with your scouts.”

Color Guard marches colors, with audience behind, from council ring up path all the way to the main parade area, before breaking ranks and removing flag from pole and folding.

Simple 1

After the introductory or opening comments, the color guard marches in, presents the colors, then retires the flag in the fire while the audience quietly salutes.

Simple 2

A simple flag retirement accompanied by a patriotic song. Have song sheets available for the audience.

After the introductory or opening comments, the color guard marches in, presents the colors, then retires the flag while the audience is singing.

Suitable tunes are:

- America the Beautiful (Copyright owned by the BSA)
- Grand Old Flag
- Old Glory
- The Star Spangled Banner

Old Glory

Color Guard comes forward, Troop at attention. Announcer hidden out of sight begins speaking:

Hello, Remember me? Some people call me "Old Glory". Others call me the "Star Spangled Banner". But whatever they call me, I am your Flag, The Flag of the United States of America....

Something has been bothering me, so I thought I might talk it over with you... because it is about you.... and me.

I remember some time ago people lined up on both sides of the street to watch a parade, and naturally I was leading every parade, proudly waving in the breeze. When your Daddy saw me coming, he immediately removed his hat and placed it against his left shoulder, so that his hand was directly over his heart...Remember?

And you, I remember you. Standing there straight as a soldier. You didn't have a hat, but you were giving the right salute. Remember little sister? Not to be outdone, she was saluting the same as you, with her hand over her heart.... Remember?

What happened? I'm still the same old flag. Oh, I have a few more stars now and a lot more blood has been shed since those days long ago. But now I don't feel as proud as I used to. When I come down the street you just stand there with your hands in your pockets, and I may get a small glance, but then you look away.

Then I see children running around and shouting; they don't seem to know who I am.... I saw one man take off his hat, then he looked around and saw no one else with their hat off, so he quickly put his hat back on.

Is it a sin to be patriotic now? Have you forgotten what I stand for? And where I've been? Anzio....Normandy... Guadal canal....Iwo Jima.....Korea..... Vietnam.... and the Persian Gulf? Look at the Memorial Honor Rolls sometime. Note the names of those who never came back. They died to keep this republic free... One Nation Under God! When you salute me... you are actually saluting them?

Well, it won't be long now until I'll be coming down your street again....So when you see me, stand straight, place you right hand over you heart, and I'll salute you by waiving back.... and I'll know....YOU REMEMBERED

Troop Salute. Color Guard, retire the flag....

After the entire flag has burned...

Two. Color Guard dismissed.

Stripes and Field Audience Participation

Preparation notes:

- The flag should be prepared by snipping the thicker end seams
- Sharp scissors or a knife is required.

In this ceremony, a flag is disassembled stripe by stripe and the audience is invited to participate by placing each strip in the fire with a moment's silent reflection. Each stripe can be accompanied by a narrator reading off the state names.

Our Flag was born on June 14th, 1777, amid the first flames of America's fight for independence. It represented 13 colonies who together fought oppression so that we today could enjoy our freedom. From those 13 colonies we have grown into a nation of 50 states.

Since those days our country has been a beacon of freedom for other peoples from around the world. We have sent men and women into harm's way to keep that beacon lit. Our flag flew proudly in 1812 when our freedom was in doubt. It was there at Fort Sumpter, Gettysburg and at Appomatox. In World War 1 it led Dough Boys as they fought across Europe. A generation later it flew over Pearl harbor, Guadacanal and Iwo Jima. It flew over Africa, Normandy and again led Americans across Europe. In Korea the flag flew from one hill to another, in Vietnam it flew proudly while it lay burned and tattered back home. The flag was there in Beirut, Granada, Panama, Kuwait, Bosnia and Kosovo.

So that is why we are here tonight, to give our flag honor as so many have done before. As this box is passed around, I would like every cub scout, boy scout, girl scout and adult leader to take a piece of our flag. Hold it tight for its still our flag.

(Let everyone take a piece)

Those of you who have a white piece please come forward and place it on the fire.

(Halfway through read below)

The white represents purity that is in all our hearts it represents the honor deep inside our soul.

Those of you who have a red piece please come forward and place your piece on the fire.

(Halfway through read below)

The red stands for the men and women in the armed forces who have served or died to keep freedom alive. It also stands for those on our soil who have died to protect the rights of others.

(Once everyone who had a red piece is done have a Webelos come forward with blue field and kneel. Then read the following.)

The blue stands for valor and courage that binds our fifty states together. The blue field is indicative of God's heaven under which it flies.

(Have the Webelos place the blue field in the fire.)

Our Flag is more than colored cloth shaped into a design, it represents us, you and I

(In the next statement, they are talking about the flag they are retiring and its history)

Tonight, we have laid to rest a very dear old friend, he did not lead soldiers into battle he did not fly from a place on high, but he has served us well. For twenty-one years it flew with honor as it watched our boys grow. Its' staff has been held by hundreds and he was saluted by thousands giving him their allegiance. Though we have laid him into our fire does not be sad, for he has served us with pride and his spirit has been passed on to our new flag.

(Have a Webelos come forward with the new flag.)

Will you please rise and join me in the Pledge of Allegiance?

Sixty Seconds Flag Tribute

This ceremony is suitable when a large mass of flags must be retired, and it is preferable that each flag has a short history or tribute. There is time for an approximately 60 second reading of the origin or history of each flag.

The fire must be very hot. Each flag is unfurled and added to the fire until completely consumed, then the next flag is added. It should be possible to retire a flag every 60 to 75 seconds. Limit the ceremony to about 30 minutes or less. You can also have multiple fire pits to retire flags in parallel.

Taps

A simple classic silent flag retirement to the sound of taps played on a bugle.

Our Flag Rest in Peace

1. Display the old flag, give its history, if known,
2. Pledge of Allegiance Respect paid to the old flag -- read aloud "I AM OLD GLORY" I am old glory; for more than 9 score years I have been the banner of hope and freedom for generation after generation of Americans. Born amid the first flames of America's fight for freedom, I am the symbol of a country that has grown from a little group of 13 colonies to a united nation of 50 sovereign states. Planted firmly on the high pinnacle of American Faith, my gently fluttering folds have proved an inspiration to untold millions. Men have followed me into battle with unwavering courage. They have looked upon me as a symbol of national unity. They have prayed that they and their fellow citizens might continue to enjoy the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, which have been granted to every American as the heritage of free men. So long as men love liberty more than life itself, so long as they treasure the priceless privileges bought with the blood of our forefathers; so long as the principles of truth, justice and charity for all remain deeply rooted in human hearts, I shall continue to be the enduring banner of the United States of America.
3. Explain to the ensemble what will happen next, and a little word or two about it. Taps are hummed slowly while the flag is cut up. ABSOLUTE SILENCE.
4. Color Guard cuts the field of blue stars out of the flag in silence. The field of blue is put onto the fire first. The stripes are laid into the fire when the stars are almost fully consumed.
5. There is absolute silence until the entire flag is completely consumed by the flames.
6. Then the color guard, with meaning, says, 'OUR FLAG REST IN PEACE.'

I Am Your Gift

Preparation - One Flag - worn, tattered and soiled, one medium fire. Take the flag and cut out the blue field with the stars, then cut the flag up into smaller pieces so that each participant can have a piece to lay on the fire.

NARRATOR -

Our flag is the symbol of our country. Have you ever stopped to think what the flag really means?

The Blue in our flag stands for valor which our ancestors fought and died for in the many battles that have been fought for our country and all for which it stands.

The White stands for the purity in all our hearts. It also represents the honor that each of us should show in all that we do in our everyday lives.

The Red stands for all the men and women who have died in the service of our country, both as members of the armed forces and as everyday citizens.

Our flag has gone into every battle into which there have been United States citizens, from the American Revolution to the Civil War, to WW I, to WW II, to the Korean Conflict the Viet Nam War to the Desert Storm.

It has flown over some battles that were never declared, such as Beirut where the Marine Barracks was blown up by terrorists at the Alfred Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, and most recently by the rescuers at the World Trade Center.

In all of these, we the American people have stayed true to the values that the Flag represents. We should always value the sacrifices that have been made for our flag and the country that it represents. We have an old friend here who has fulfilled his duty to our country. He has become worn and tattered and we are here tonight to retire him with honor.

We shouldn't be sad about the retirement of our friend. We are not burning him in anger, we are only releasing his spirit so that he can continue to serve us in our thoughts. Now I would invite each of you to take a piece of cloth from the box being passed around and each of you in turn place it on the fire. You can pause for a moment to reflect upon what the flag means to each of us.

Troop Attention.

"No disrespect should be shown to the flag of the United State of America; The Flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

Color Guard enters in silence, displaying unfurled flag to the troop. (The flags colors are being separated during the reading.)

I AM YOUR FLAG

I was born on June 14, 1777.

I am more than cloth shaped into a design.

I am the refuge of the world's oppressed people.

I am the silent sentinel of Freedom.

I am the emblem of the greatest sovereign nation on earth.

I am the inspiration for which American Patriots gave their lives and fortunes.

I have led your sons in to battle from Valley Forge to the blistering desert of the Arabian Peninsula.

I walked in silence with each of your honored dead to their final resting place beneath the silent white crosses, row upon row.

I have flown through peace and war, strife and prosperity, and amidst it all I have been respected.

"Old Glory" is my nickname; proudly I wave on high. Honor me. respect me, defend me with your lives and fortunes. Never let my enemies tear me down from my lofty position lest I never return. Keep alight the fires of patriotism, strive earnestly for the spirit of democracy. Worship Eternal God and keep his commandments, and I shall remain the bulwark of peace of freedom for all people.

FOR I AM YOUR FLAG!

(Stop here until the colors are completely separated. Then continue:)

My red stripes symbolize the blood spilled in defense of the glorious nation.

Let us retire the Red Stripes--Salute!

(burn the RED stripes)

Two.

My white stripes signify the burning tears shed by Americans who lost their sons.

Let us retire the White Stripes --Salute.

(burn the WHITE stripes)

Two.

My blue field is indicative of God's heaven under which we fly. My stars, clustered together, unify 50 States as one for God and Country.

Let us retire the Blue Field with Stars.--Salute.

(burn the BLUE Field with Stars)

Two

Color Guard files out in silence.

A Flag of 13 Stripes

By Benny Ledford

Lower the flag from the pole (or remove it from the staff) and carry it to the fire site.

Place the stars (as the audience sees them) in the upper left hand corner. This is an appropriate reading to start the ceremony:

"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."

(Cut the field of blue from the stripes - have someone hold onto this piece.)

(Next, cut each stripe from the "whole" and lay each piece, one at a time, across the flames.)

These are some readings for each stripe:

FIRST STRIPE: The 13 stripes stand for the thirteen original colonies which are; Massachusetts, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and New Jersey.

SECOND STRIPE: The white stands for purity.

THIRD STRIPE: The red stands for courage.

FOURTH STRIPE: "Give me liberty or give me death".

FIFTH STRIPE: "One if by land, two if the sea".

SIXTH STRIPE: We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.

SEVENTH STRIPE: We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal. They are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

EIGHTH STRIPE: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

NINTH STRIPE: Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of speech or press.

TENTH STRIPE: "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth to this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

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 on account of sex.

TWELFTH STRIPE: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

THIRTEENTH STRIPE: "One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

Respect paid to the old flag -- read aloud "I AM OLD GLORY"

I am old glory;

For more the 9 score years I have been the banner of hope and freedom for generation after generation of Americans. Born amid the first flames of America's fight for freedom, I am the symbol of a country that has grown from a little group of 13 colonies to a united nation of 50 sovereign states. Planted firmly on the high pinnacle of American Faith, my gently fluttering folds have proved an inspiration to untold millions. Men have followed me into battle with unwavering courage. They have looked upon me as a symbol of national unity. They have prayed that they and their fellow citizens might continue to enjoy the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, which have been granted to every American as the heritage of free men. So long as men love liberty more than life itself, so long as they treasure the priceless privileges bought with the blood of our forefathers; so long as the principles of truth, justice and charity for all remain deeply rooted in human hearts, I shall continue to be the enduring banner of the United States of America.

Explain to the ensemble what will happen next, and a little word or two about it. Taps are hummed slowly while the flag is cut up. Then ABSOLUTE SILENCE.

Group says together:

Please join me in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance

"I Pledge Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. "

then sing America (my Country 'Tis of Thee)

Patriotic Reading

The flag of the United States of America is an honored symbol of our nation's unity, it's hopes, it's achievements, it's glory and its high resolve.

When the flag is in such condition, through wear or damage, that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, it shall be destroyed in a dignified manner befitting such a symbol. The traditional way is to cut the flag into pieces and burn it in a modest but blazing fire. As we perform this respected duty, let us reflect on the design and meaning of our flag.

The Blue field or union is the point of honor, the upper corner of the Flag's own right. The symbolism of the right hand goes far back in antiquity when it was the weapon hand. Raising the right arm free of any weapon meant peace. It became a salute, a way of giving praise and honor. The union is blue, representing the night sky with stars forming a new and glorious constellation. There is one star for each state in our union. It is said the point of honor of our flag was made from the blue cloak belonging to a captain in the Continental Army.

The stripes are symbolic of beams of morning light, rays emanating from the sun. Thirteen red and white stripes, one for each of the original thirteen colonies. The stripes in our flag were inspired by the rattlesnake flag flown on the ships of the Continental Fleet and the striped banner of the Sons of Liberty. Though the pattern has changed, the bars of shining red and gleaming white have remained. The stripes are alternating, seven red and six white. The red standing for courage and the blood of those brave men and women who fought and died to establish and preserve our republic; the white representing the purity and high moral resolve on which our country was founded.

The blue of a captain's cloak, the white of a soldier's shirt, the red from a flannel petticoat of a patriot's wife. this was our flag. This is the flag that stands for honor -- yours and mine.

As the fire consumes the worn and tattered material in its purifying flame, let us remember the words of George Washington when the Star-spangled Banner was first flown by the Continental Army: "We take the stars from heaven and the red from our mother country. We separate the red by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing liberty." Thus, the Stars and Stripes became what it is; born amid the strife of battle, it has become the standard around which a free people have fought to preserve the greatest nation in the world.

Flag Keepers Ceremony

CEREMONY LEADER

(Include a chaplain/prayer per your tradition)

"We are gathered here to destroy these flags that have been deemed no longer serviceable. It is proclaimed that each of these flags has served well. These flags have inspired those who desired the taste of freedom and have represented hope to those oppressed by tyranny and terror. These flags have welcomed any and all in the name of liberty.

The American flag flies free to the wind. The American flag flies above residential porches, camp sites, small businesses, corporate offices, hospitals, schools, military and naval bases, government buildings and nonprofit organizations. The American flag is the most displayed and recognized banner in the world.

These flags serve as constant reminders to all of us that we live in a country where our freedom has been deeply purchased by blood, sweat, tears and ultimate sacrifice. We must not forsake what those in the service to this flag, and their families, have forfeited.

We have here this day an empty Place of Honor for those who cannot attend due to devastating injury, infirmity, and death.

Please direct your attention to the Place of Honor as I read today's names of ___ (fill in the number) of those patriots. In your mind's eye see these people and think about them."

To all who shall see these presents, greeting. Know ye that these flags have served well and honorably. Their stars and stripes have been loosed to the winds of freedom and have basked in the light of liberty."

CALL ATTENTION/ALL RISE *(Those that Can)*

"Please join me to recite the Pledge of Allegiance": (PAUSE) "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. And to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all".

STAND AT EASE

"The U.S. Flag Code states", (PAUSE)

"The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning".

(OPTIONAL) Dedicate this ceremony to an individual American who loved the Flag (Read previously obtained info about the honoree)

CALL ATTENTION/ALL RISE

Staff member inserts one properly folded flag into the incinerator/fire

"While the storm clouds gather far across the sea,
Let us swear allegiance to a land that's free,
Let us all be grateful for a land so fair,
As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer."

Please join me now to sing God Bless America

God bless America,
Land that I love.
Stand beside her, and guide her
Thru the night with a light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans, white with foam
God bless America, my home sweet home.

STAND AT EASE

“Ladies and gentlemen, this concludes the ceremony. God bless America.”

Remember Me?

Remember Me? Yeah, that's right, red & white stripes, fifty stars on a blue field in the upper left corner, I am your Flag, but I've also been known by "Old Glory", the "Stars and Stripes", and the "Star Spangled Banner". Whatever you call me, I am the flag of the United States of America.

I remember years ago that people used to honor me, fly me with pride outside their homes and at work, and children in school would pledge their Allegiance to me every day. They would carry me in parades and people would watch and salute me with pride as I passed by, proudly waving in the wind.

When men and woman saw me coming, the men removed their hats and placed it over their hearts and the women placed their right hands over theirs. And their children were taught respect for the flag, and what to do as well. Now I'm lucky if they even recognize me, or even notice me at all. Now, the young boys and girls make fun of those who carry me, and call them names. They haven't learned, or don't remember about the thousands of men and women who gave up their lives for me. People who knew the meaning of Freedom, Liberty, Justice, and Peace.

Why has this happened? I'm still your American Flag. I haven't really changed that much... just added a few stars over the years, been a whole lot more places, and though it all, stood strong by you. Why don't people respect me the same way they used to? A lot of blood has been shed since those parades of long ago. A lot more men and women have died defending me. When you honor me, you honor those men and women who gave up every-thing for your freedom. When I am flown, I see people not notice. When I am in a parade, I see people just stand there, with their hands in their pockets. I may get a small glance, but then you look away. Next time, please notice and respect me. Next time stand and be proud to be an American Citizen!

I see the young children of today running around and not being taught how to act when I'm around don't the parents of today care? Don't they know how to act? I saw one man start to take off his hat and looked around and saw no one else doing it, so just put it back on. I saw some kids calling the Boy Scouts who were carrying me names and making fun of them. I saw many just sit there as I passed by, talking with one another like I didn't even exist. Is it now wrong to be patriotic? Have today's Americans forgotten what I stand for and where I've been?

If you don't care, who will? If you don't teach our children what I stand for, and how to act around me, who will? If our children don't learn how to respect our flag, what it means to defend our country, and how important Freedom, Liberty, and Patriotic Duty is, what future does our mighty country have? So, when you see me; stand straight, think about what I stand for; think about all of the Americans that have died for our country, and place your

right-hand over your heart or salute to honor me. I'll be saluting you back by waving strong and proud in the wind. And I'll know that you remembered me.

Red and White

In this ceremony, pairs of stripes are cut away from the flag until just one red stripe remains.

A patriotic reading assigns meaning to pairs of stripes. There will be 6 pairs, 1 red stripe and a blue field.

Four Pieces

Contributed by Charles Good; ASM for Troop 350 in Raleigh, N.C.

The flag should be cut in half along the blue field, then in half again along the blue field once more between the 7th and 8th stripe.

Adult Leader: The U.S. flag is more than just some brightly colored cloth... it is a symbol of our nation.

Scout #1: Seven red stripes and six white strips; together they represent the original 13 colonies that gained us liberty.

Scout #2: The red stripes remind us of the lifeblood of brave men and women who were ready to die for this, their country.

Scout #3: The white stripes remind us of purity and cleanliness of purpose, thought, word and deed.

Scout #4: The blue is for truth and justice, like the eternal blue of the star-filled heavens.

Scout #5: The stars represent the fifty sovereign states of our union.

Adult Leader or SPL: The U.S. flag should be treated with respect when it's flying, and it should be treated with respect when it's being retired.

Scout #6: The American Creed states, "it is my duty to my country to love it, to respect its Constitution, to obey its laws, to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies."

Scout #7: Therefore, we retire flags with dignity and respect when they become worn, torn, faded, or badly soiled.

Adult Leader or SPL: This flag is ready to be retired. Its history is as follows:

First Raised (when):

At (location):

Memorable event or fact:

Scout #8: A flag ceases to be a flag when it is cut into pieces. We cut the flag into four pieces: three red and white striped banners and the blue star field. We leave the blue field intact because no one should ever let the union be broken.

Adult Leader or SPL: As the parts of the flag are placed in the fire remember... Old Flags never die; they just get fired up!

The Scouts will maintain a vigil over the fire until no traces of the flag remnants remain. Then the ashes will be collected and buried.

This concludes this ceremony. Thank you for attending.

Original 13 States History

This is a ceremony suitable for very large flags where it is necessary to break down the flag before optionally burning it. As each stripe is cut from the flag (starting at the bottom), a brief history of that original state is read.

There should be enough scouts participating to support the flag for every 3 feet on the long sides.

And 2 scouts handling the cutting, and one to assist with the removed part.

FULL CEREMONY

(The Unit Leader takes his place five paces to the right of the burning fire and two paces in front of the burning fire facing the audience. The Retirement MC and the Color Guard are stationed with the flag in a position facing the fire with their backs to the audience at least ten paces away from the fire. The Retirement MC is on the right side of the Color Guard members. The flag to be retired is carried by the Color Guard member in the middle of the assembly.)

RETIREMENT MC: Color guard, attention.

Color guard, forward march.

(The Color Guard advances to within two paces of the fire.)

Color guard, halt.

Color guard, about face.

RETIREMENT MC: Title 36, Section 176, of the United States Code states, “No disrespect should be shown to the flag of the United States of America.” Furthermore, Paragraph (K) of this same Title 36, Section 176 states, “The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.”

The BSA publication “Our Flag” states, “When the national flag is worn beyond repair, burn it thoroughly and completely on a modest, but blazing fire. This should be done in a simple manner with dignity and respect. Be sure the flag is reduced to ashes, unrecognizable as a former flag.”

The flag we present tonight was inspected earlier this day. During that inspection it was found to be no longer suitable for display. A fresh new flag now flies in its place.

UNIT LEADER: Tonight, we will retire this great symbol of freedom throughout the world. Please remain silent until directed otherwise. **ABSOLUTE DIGNITY MUST BE MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE CEREMONY!**

Please stand out of respect for the flag of our great nation. Scouts, attention.

Just a simple piece of colored cloth; sewn together in a red, white, and blue design. A piece of cloth that of itself does nothing more than hang or blow in the wind. Each flag does not only represent its own history, but that of every flag that has flown before it. To many millions of people throughout our nation’s glorious history, it has stood tall, standing as a monument of Freedom, for all Americans.

Men and women have given their lives for it, fought for it, cried for it, and revered it as a symbol of the greatest country on earth. Books, songs, and poems have been written for it, and our National Anthem was inspired by it. Each day our children are encouraged to pledge their allegiance to it, and whenever it is raised or passes by, we all place our hands over our hearts or salute it. It stands for the freedom we all share and the pride and patriotism we feel for our country.

RETIREMENT MC: Color guard, present the colors. Please place your hand over your heart or salute if you are in uniform.

(The Retirement MC steps to the position opposite that of the Unit Leader. The color guard unfolds the flag for the last time, and presents the flag tilted so that it can be seen by the audience. The Retirement MC waits for at least 15 seconds after the flag is in full view before continuing the ceremony.)

RETIREMENT MC: Two.

UNIT LEADER: I am your flag. I was born on June 14, 1777. I am more than just a piece of cloth shaped into a colorful design. I am the refuge of the world's oppressed people. I am the silent sentinel of freedom. I am the emblem of the greatest sovereign nation on earth. I am the inspiration for which American Patriots gave their lives and fortunes. I have led your sons into battle from Valley Forge to the dry deserts of Iraq. I walked in silence with each of your honored dead to their final resting place, beneath the silent white crosses row upon row. I have flown through peace and war, strife and prosperity, and amidst it all I have been respected.

“Old Glory” is my nickname; proudly I wave on high. Honor me, respect me, and defend me with your lives and your fortunes. Never let my enemies tear me down from my lofty position lest I never return. Keep alight the fires of patriotism, strive earnestly for the spirit of democracy, and keep me always as a symbol of freedom and liberty in our country.

I am now old and faded, do not let me fly in disrepair, rather retire me from my duties only to replace me with a new flag so that I may continue to symbolize our country. With this, renew your commitment to what I stand for and pledge your allegiance to me one final time.

RETIREMENT MC: Please place your hand over your heart or salute if you are in uniform. Join me now in one final Pledge of Allegiance:

“I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic, for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Color guard, retire the colors.

(The Unit Leader now faces the fire. The color guard now lays the flag flat and places it into the flame, folding the corners into the flame so that all the flag is consumed by the fire. The members of the Color Guard then step to the sides of the fire facing the flame, come to attention and salute. The Retirement MC will inspect the fire and stir the ashes of the fire to ensure that the flag is completely consumed by the flame. When the flag is consumed, the MC retreats to the position opposite from the Unit Leader, comes to attention, and salutes. There is now at least a 15 second pause before continuing.)

RETIREMENT MC: She is gone!

Two.

Color guard retreat.

(The Color Guard members now turn and face the audience. The retirement MC now goes to the center of the fire faces the audience. They remain after the audience leaves, prepared to stand vigil until the fire burns to ambers.)

UNIT LEADER: Please honor our nation and join in singing “God Bless America”.
When the song is completed, please depart from the fire in silent dignity.

*God bless America, land that I love.
Stand beside Her, and guide Her,
Through the night, with the light from above.
From the mountains, to the prairies,
To the oceans white with foam.
God bless America, my home sweet home.
God bless America, my home sweet home.*

(The Unit Leader now departs with the audience. The Retirement MC and the Color Guard complete whatever tasks necessary to put out the fire. The grommets from the flag should be separated from the ashes. These may be kept by Color Guard members or distributed.)

Created for use by Pack 729 and fellow scout units.

Dedicated to Wood Badge Course S2-662-18-4, specifically, the Eagle Patrol.