

Flag retirement ceremony

By: Jim Gnadinger/Paul Jolliffe

"Do not read aloud the parts in italics"

Advance Preparation:

Prepare the worn flag by cutting off the supporting edge, and cutting out the Union section of the Flag. Cut the remaining flag into about 24 to 96 pieces for typical flags. (Pieces about 8" by 12" work well, but be sure to have enough so that everyone in attendance will have at least one.) Run a length of wire, approximately 12 inches, through the grommets in the standing edge and fasten the ends of the wire together. This will make retrieval of the grommets more reliable after the ceremony. Place the cut pieces in a zip lock storage bag and fold inside a US Flag that will not be retired that evening.

Prepare a cassette tape recording or CD recording of "The National Anthem", "America The Beautiful", "Battle Hymn of the Republic", and "Proud to be an American". Have a tape player or CD player with the volume set and player positioned so that the tape or CD can be started from your speaking position without fumbling.

Prepare a modest fire lay; such as a council fire approximately 18" to 24" square by 12" to 16" high.

Recruit four or more Color Guards who will carry the flag and who will carefully unfold it during the ceremony. Run through the unfolding ahead of time so that they can do it without dropping pieces of the worn flag. Extra Color Guards will distribute flag pieces to Honor Guards.

The fire should have about a 15-minute head start so that it is blazing well and has formed a good bed of coals. Use lots of light; split wood to accomplish this.

"United States Federal Law provides that '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.' (36 U.S.C. 176(k))

"According to the BSA publication 'Your Flag', 'When our national flag is worn beyond repair, cut it into small pieces that will burn easily 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.'

Ceremony:

[Start "Proud To Be An American" in background]

[Audience files quietly into the ceremony area. Leader and Color Guard take place at the side of the ceremony area.

Leader then moves behind the fire, facing the audience.]

[Start "America the Beautiful" in background]

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

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

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

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 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.

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 and WW II, to the Korean Conflict the Vietnam War, Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

It has flown over some battles that were never declared, such as Beirut where the Marine Barracks was blown up by terrorists, the Alfred Murrah Building in Oklahoma City and the Pentagon building.

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 should not 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.

[Stop music]

"No disrespect should be shown to the flag of the United States 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."

[Tonight I will ask that all present in the audience become Honor Guards for this evenings Flag Retirement Ceremony.]

Honor Guard, Attention: *(Please Stand)*

Color Guard, Advance!

[Color Guard forms a line in front of the fire, occupying as much space as they will require to unfold the flag.]

Color Guard, Present the Colors!

[Color Guard carefully unfolds the flag. Extra members of the Color Guard may support the center of the flag from behind. The flag is left in approximately level position. When the flag has been unfolded, extra Color Guard members remove the Union and flag pieces, handing the Union and standing edge to the leader who will, if not done previously, run a wire through the grommets of the standing edge.]

(The Color Guard will now raise the unfolded flag so that light from the fire glows through it.)

[Start "Battle Hymn of the Republic"]

I Me, an individual, a committee of one.

Pledge Dedicate all of my worldly goods to give without self-pity.

Allegiance My love and my devotion.

To The Flag Our standard, Old Glory, a symbol of freedom. Wherever she waves, there's respect because your loyalty has given her a dignity that shouts freedom is everybody's job.

[Of The]
United That means that we have all come together.

States Of America Individual communities that have united into 50 great states. 50 individual communities with pride and dignity and purpose, all divided with imaginary boundaries, yet united to a common purpose, and that's love for country

[And To The]
Republic Republic ... a state in which sovereign power is invested in representatives chosen by the people to govern. And government is the people and it's from the people to the leaders, not from the leaders the people.

[For Which It Stands]
One Nation, Under God One Nation ... meaning, so blessed by God.

Indivisible Incapable of being divided.

With Liberty Which is freedom, the right of power to live one's own life, without threats, fear, or some sort of retaliation.

And Justice The principle or qualities of dealing fairly with others.

For All Which means, it's as much your country as it is mine.

[Stop the music]

Honor Guard Salute! *"Recite the Pledge of Allegiance".*

Two!
(Color Guard may now fold the American Flag)

Please be seated.

[Now I would invite each of you to take a piece of cloth from one of the Color Guards as they offer it to you. We will pause for a moment to reflect upon what the flag means to each of us.]

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 have all been handed out. Then continue:)

"This flag has flown proudly over our community, but it is now worn beyond repair. As I place the standing edge into the fire, I ask that the Honor Guard, two by two, in an orderly manner, starting with the Color Guard, please place your piece of the flag carefully on the fire."

[After all the stripes have been burned, one at a time, then the Union is ready to be burned. BEFORE the Union is spread across the fire, the person holding the Union, throughout the ceremony should KISS the blue portion, for respect. The portion is then laid, as a whole piece and not torn in any way, across the fire and all is quiet until the last speck of blue turns to ash.]

Honor Guard, Attention! *(Please Stand)*

Honor Guard, Salute! *[Wait for the Anthem to complete.]*

Start the National Anthem.

Two!

Color Guard, Dismiss! *[Wait for the Color Guard to withdraw from the area.]*

Honor Guard, Dismiss!

End of the ceremony should be followed by a silent dismissal.

When the fire has been extinguished, remove the grommets for disposal in a manner that they will not be disturbed.