

Flag Retirement Ceremony



Mackenzie Parker with American Heritage Girls MO3130 earned her Flag Retirement Merit Badge at the museum today. The honor guard brought in the flag to be retired and it was replaced with a new flag. Mackenzie also demonstrated and explained the 13 folds of the flag.

Mackenzie demonstrated how to retire a large flag. In the case of a large flag, it can be cut up into smaller sections. After burning the flag(s), the ashes were buried in a special flag grave.

At the grounds of the museum, we have a flag collection box, burn pit, and flag grave. You are welcome to drop off flags to be retired. Congratulations Mackenzie!



Here are other tips about the ceremony.

When an American flag becomes worn, faded, torn or soiled, it should be retired and replaced with a new flag. There are several ways to respectfully dispose of the American flag without showing disgrace. The most common method is burning the torn or tattered flag in a special ceremony. All participants should be in full Class A uniform.

Here are the steps you should follow:

- First, fold it lengthwise twice. Then, starting at the end of the stripes, fold it as a triangle over on itself until you're left with a triangle that shows just the blue field and white stars.
- Then prepare a large enough fire space to sufficiently burn the flag completely. Next place the flag in the fire and while it burns, individuals at the ceremony should salute or recite the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Finally, end the ceremony with a moment of silence and bury the ashes once the flag is completely consumed.

Recommendations and Cautions:

- When burning flags made of synthetic fibers, be aware that they may burn quickly and emit noxious gases into the air. Handle such flags with care.
- It is important 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. Make sure the fire is safely extinguished before leaving the location.
- Large flags may need to be cut into pieces before being placed into the fire. If this is necessary, the blue field should be separated from the stripes and then each of the stripe separated from each other. Scissors should be used to cut the flag. It should never be cut with a knife or torn in any way.

This is what the 13 folds mean:

1. The first fold of our flag is a symbol of life.
2. The second fold signifies our belief in eternal life.
3. The third fold is made in honor and tribute of the veteran departing our ranks, and who gave a portion of his or her life for the defense of our country to attain peace.
4. The fourth fold exemplifies our weaker nature as citizens trusting in God; it is to Him we turn for His divine guidance.
5. The fifth fold is an acknowledgement to our country, for in the words of Stephen Decatur, "Our country, in dealing with other countries, may she always be right, but it is still our country, right or wrong."
6. The sixth fold is for where our hearts lie. It is with our heart that we 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.
7. The seventh fold is a tribute to our armed forces, for it is through the armed forces that we protect our country and our flag against all enemies.
8. The eighth fold is a tribute to the one who entered into the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day, and to honor our mother, for whom it flies on Mother's Day.
9. The ninth fold is an honor to womanhood, for it has been through their faith, love, loyalty, and devotion that the character of men and women who have made this country great have been molded.
10. The 10th fold is a tribute to father, for he, too, has given his sons and daughters for the defense of our country since he or she was first-born.
11. The 11th fold, in the eyes of Hebrew citizens, represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon and glorifies, in their eyes, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
12. The 12th fold, in the eyes of a Christian citizen, represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies, in their eyes, God the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost.
13. The last fold, when the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost, reminding us of our national motto, "In God We Trust."