

# FLAG RETIREMENT CEREMONIES



**Compiled by:  
Randy Worcester  
randywoo@aol.com  
Assistant District Commissioner  
Eastern District  
Andrew Jackson Council  
Jackson, Mississippi  
November, 1997**

## **Flag Retirement**

When the United States flag (Old Glory) becomes worn, torn, faded or badly soiled, it is time to replace it with a new flag, and the old flag should be "retired" with all the dignity and respect befitting our nation's flag.

### **What is proper?**

The Flag Code covers the proper methods for honoring the United States flag. The following is the part of the code that covers flag disposal.

*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. "Retired with Honor"*

### **Flag Burning?**

A flag is never said to be burned - it is retired. That means it is NOT a Flag Burning Ceremony. Burning a flag that is worn, faded, or tattered is the only method recommended by Congress. The burning should take place at a ceremony which shows respect and honor to the flag/s being retired.

If you are attending a Flag Retirement with younger scouts, you may want to take the time to explain about the ceremony. Some young scouts may not see the difference between the flags being burned on TV by some demonstrator and the one being retired. A few minutes of explanation before the ceremony may save tears and worries during it.

### **Where do I find an "experienced" flag?**

Check with your local council office. Often flags are dropped off by people. Your local schools may be a source. Your sponsoring organization may be able to help. Check with your VFW Posts and other Veteran's posts. An ad in a local paper may get you more flags than you want but it can be another source. Almost anywhere a flag is flown on a regular schedule like a bank, post office, car dealerships etc.

### **Be careful!**

Your fire should be active but not huge. If a fire had just been started, the flag may put the fire out rather than burn. Next, be careful of wind. If it is windy, the flag may catch fire then blow out of the fire causing a problem. Make sure everyone knows their part in the ceremony. This will help insure things go well. Make sure all precautions are taken that would normally be done when a campfire is set. And last, Beware of the flag material. Some flags will melt rather than burn, other will flare up when touched by flames.

### **Cut or Whole**

Many people feel that a flag ceases to be a flag when it is cut into pieces. In addition, it is easier to completely incinerate the flag, if it is cut into smaller pieces. A flag should never be torn up like an old bed sheet. It should be cut up with scissors or shears in a methodical manner. The corners of the flag should be stretched out over a table top and someone should cut the flag in half, vertically (be careful not to cut up the blue star field. Then, place the two halves together and cut them in half, horizontally. You will end up with four pieces of flag, one being the blue star field.

The reason we do not cut the blue star field is it represents the union of the fifty states and one should never let the union be broken.

### **Know Your Flags**

Before accepting a flag for retirement, the recipient should obtain information about its history. For example: Where has it flown? How long? Any memorable events happen at that site? This information should be used in the ceremony.

## Flag Retirement #1

This ceremony is an elaborate one used by a Boy Scout Troop that specializes in Flag retirement. They have practiced this ceremony many times. Their uniforms are cleaned and pressed for the occasion.

They are developing a patch to commemorate the ceremony that will include stars around the boarder that the Scouts will receive with each ceremony that they participate in with one day of flag retirement constituting a ceremony. The grommets of the flags retired are also retained and presented to the scouts as tokens of their efforts. The flag ashes are ceremoniously buried, although there are little ashes left from the nylon style flags used today.

They have designed a propane tank, 55 gallon drum, with roofers torch burner unit on a wheeled base that we surround with white board and appropriate bunting for our burner unit.

There are three main groups in the program and a Master of Ceremonies. The groups are: Duty Honor Guard, Retirement Honor Guard and Cremation Honor Guard. Each group contains approximately five scouts.

Our normal area is laid out with the Flags to be retired located at one end, on white table cloths, properly folded and arranged for retirement as well as final viewing. The area is usually roped off with a white decorative rope and the United States Flag flies over the front or rear center of our area. The cremation area or burner area is located at the opposite side or corner from the flags. The center of the area is left wide open where the final rites of the flag are conducted. During the entire day as long as Flags remain to be retired an Honor Guard stands at ease or when approached comes to attention at the Flag table.

The ceremony begins with the Master of the Ceremony calling the Scouts to attention. The Retirement Honor Guard (RHG) assembles in the middle of the field near the Master and the Cremation Honor Guard stands ready at the burner unit. While the Duty Honor Guard comes to attention at their post.

The RHG moves to the table after appropriate commands of left/right face forward march etc. are given by the RHG commander. At the table they request permission to take a Flag for retirement. The Duty Honor Guard commander provides a flag and salutes its departure. The RHG does an about face and marches to the center of the field and does a wheel right/left to come about and face the Master and the crowd. Here the RHG asks for permission of the Master to retire the flag. Once it is given the flag is unfolded and held open a final Hand Salute is rendered by all of the Scouts present, then the flag is cut length wise separating the stripes from the upper half which includes the Canton (stars). Next the Canton is cut from the remaining stripes. This makes the flag no longer a flag and the three pieces are ready to be burned. The RHG reassembles and under proper command moves to the burner area where the peices are presented to the Cremation Honor Guard, who place the flag on the burner. The two pieces of stripes are laid open on the fire first with the canton being the final peice spread openly on top. Once the flag is consumed and no parts are recognizable as a flag they report to the Master that the flag is retired. The Master then calls for the Honor Guards to post and then dismisses them except for the Duty Honor Guard who remain on station until relieved. The Scouts are rotated through these duties on a regular basis to give them experience and to allow others to share in standing watch.

The final flag of the day is usually the one that has flown over the days ceremonies. It is lowered and a new flag is hoisted to take its place. Then the entire ceremony is repeated as above for the final flag.

## Flag Retirement #2

Composed by Stan Pope, a volunteer Scouter for W.D. Boyce Council, BSA, Peoria, IL. Revised 4/20/97.

This ceremony provides an example of, and an explanation of, the etiquette related to destroying a worn U.S. flag. Of all the Flag Burning ceremonies I have seen, this is most elegant in its simplicity and completeness. Group participation is as important as it is moving.

[I am told that the suggestions in the BSA Publication "Your Flag" have changed, and that they no longer include the suggestion to cut the flag into pieces before burning. This may be because some folks felt it to be offensive. Know your group. Use your best judgement. Carry out your ceremony with solemnity and respect.]

[I am also told that some modern synthetic materials emit much noxious smoke when burned. This could detract significantly from the effect of the ceremony. Such flags might better be disposed in more private circumstances. -- SBP.]

### Advance Preparation:

Prepare the worn flag by cutting off the supporting edge, and cutting 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.) Cut one of the stars from a piece of the blue field, and cut a bit of a red and a white stripe. 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. Group five key pieces (the standing edge, star, the blue field and two pieces of stripes) so that they can be located easily, perhaps by fastening them together with a large safety pin. Fold all of the pieces into a properly folded American Flag which will convey the worn flag to the ceremony.

Prepare a cassette tape recording of the National Anthem with about 5 second of blank leader and a minute or two of blank trailer. Have a tape player with the volume set and player positioned so that the tape 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.

### Ceremony:

[Leader and Color Guard take place at the side of the ceremony area. Leader, take place behind the fire, facing the audience.]

"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.'

"This duty may be carried out less ceremoniously than we will do here, and it need not be more ceremonious. It is, I believe, important that the assembled group be participants rather than spectators. I ask you to serve as Honor

Guards for this ceremony. On command, please form a circle around the fire so that the Color Guards are a part of your circle.

"I hope that you will find this ceremony as moving as I did when I first experienced it.

"Color Guard, Advance!" [Color Guard forms a line behind the fire, occupying as much space as they will require to unfold the flag.]

"Honor Guard, Assemble" [Wait until the group completes the circle.]

"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 first hand standing edge to leader, then each take a bundle of pieces and distribute them to the Honor Guard, withholding pieces for the Color Guard. Color Guards should fold the Colors. They will place their pieces of flag on the fire after the leader, and then wait, at attention, until the last pieces of flag have been placed on the fire. When the pieces have been distributed...]

"This flag has flown proudly over our community, but it is now worn beyond repair. [Adjust this sentence as appropriate.] I will place these pieces in different parts of the fire so that each can burn fully and easily. Here is the standing edge [place it in the fire]... a piece of a red stripe... a piece of a white stripe... a piece of the blue field... and one of the stars...

"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."

[When the last piece of flag has been placed in the fire and the Honor Guard have returned to their places, start the tape player.]

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

"Two! Color Guard, Dismiss!" [Wait for the Color Guard to withdraw from the circle.]

"Honor Guard, Dismiss!" [Stop the tape player.]

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

## Flag Retirement #3

Author Unknown

This ceremony is converted from a well known opening Flag ceremony. It shows that you too can come up with a Flag ceremony that is unique to your group. Look in the BSA book, *Staging Den & Pack Ceremonies* for more ideas.

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... Quadal canal....Iwo Jima.....Korea..... Vietnam.... and the Persian Gulf?

Take a 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... At ease or " two"...

Color Guard dismissed.

## Flag Retirement #4

I personally like ceremonies that involve the audience. They take home a memory of participation as opposed to just watching.

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 of our hearts. It also represent the honor that each of us should show in all that we do in our everyday lives.

The Red stands for the courage of 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.

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 to the Vietnam 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 and the Alfred Murrah Building in Oklahoma City a short time ago.

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.

## Flag Retirement #5

Author Unknown

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.

## **Flag Retirement #6**

Author Unknown

Group says together: Pledge of Allegiance then sing America (My Country T'is of Thee)

Color of the flag:

Remember as you look at your Flag, which is the symbol of our nation, that it is red because of human sacrifice. It is blue because of the true blue loyalty of its defenders. It is white to symbolize liberty - our land of the free. The stars are symbols of the united efforts and hope in the hearts of many people striving for a greater nobler America.

Hold the Flag Up:

Another appropriate song may be sung (optional)

Procedure for Flag Burning:

(a pair of scissors should be on hand) Take the flag and unfold. Place stars (as audience sees it) in the upper left hand corner. (One minute of silent meditation may be inserted if desired).

Then either cut or tear the position of the blue containing the stars from the flag. Have one person hold the blue in his arms until the end of the ceremony because the blue and stars is the last part of the flag to be burned.

Now tear one stripe off at a time. Burn it in the fire by laying it across the flames; not in a lump. Burn each stripe thoroughly before tearing off the next stripe to be burned.

After all the stripes have been burned, one at a time, then the blue and stars is ready to be burned. BEFORE the blue and stars is spread across the fire, the blue portion should be KISSED for respect by the person holding the blue throughout the ceremony.

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.

Sing - Star Spangled Banner; or other appropriate song.

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

## **Flag Retirement #7**

Based upon VFW ceremony

The Troop assembles in meeting, out-of-doors, at night. Members are aligned in two parallel rows about twenty feet apart, facing each other. A small fire is burning opposite the speaker and beyond the rows of members.

Honor Guard: "We wish to present a number of unserviceable Flags of our County for inspection and disposal."

Speaker: "Advance with your detail and present the Flags for disposal and inspection."

(Honor Guard is brought to attention, take the Flags which are to be inspected, march abreast down center and halt two paces in front of the Speaker.

Honor Guard: "We present these unserviceable Flags for your inspection."

Speaker: "Is the present condition of these Flags the result of their usual service as the Emblem of our Country?"

Honor Guard: "These Flags have become faded and worn over the graves of our departed comrades and the soldier and sailor dead of all nation's wars."

Speaker: "Have any of these Flags served any other purpose?"

Honor Guard: "Some of these Flags have been displayed in various public places."

Speaker: "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. The audience shall stand at attention."

(The Honor Guard about faces. The detail marches down center to the fire. The detail lines up behind the fire, which is burning low.)

Speaker: "Almighty God, the Great Master of All Scouts, bless and consecrate this present hour."

"We thank Thee for our Country and its Flag, and for the liberty for which it stands."

"To clean and purging flame we commit these Flags, worn-out in worthy service. As they yield their substance to the fire, may Thy Holy Light spread over us and bring to our hearts renewed devotion to God and Country. Amen."

Speaker: "Hand salute."

(Bugler sounds "To the Colors.")

Speaker: (at conclusion of "To the Colors") "Two."

(The Honor Guard shall resume its station and detail is dismissed.)

## Flag Retirement #8

Scouts and leaders line up at regular flag positions, with the drums, bugle and urn in the center.

Speaker orders: "Attention", He orders: "Color Guard to flag pole", drummers march the color detail to the pole and the field watch commander orders: "Lower the flag."

The flag is then presented to the speaker, the color guard captain then hands the flag to the speaker, and says, "We deliver this sacred symbol to your hands, to be retired with dignity, honor and respect." He salutes.

The color guard then holds the flag at the six points and the speaker strips the grommets and burns the mounting strip.

The thirteen stripes are then cut off one by one and dropped in the urn.

The blue field is then handed to the speaker who burns it and says his part.

Speaker then dismisses the color guard, who are drummed into formation.

Speaker then orders all to leave the quadrangle in silence and dismisses them.

The Follow sayings are made as each strip is burned.

#1 In honor of the thirteen original colonies and our forefathers who founded this great nation, we salute you.

#2 To the men who died in the War for Independence, we salute you.

#3 To those men who fell in the War of 1812, to preserve our freedom, we salute you.

#4 To the brave soldiers on both sides, The North and The South, in the Civil War, we salute you.

#5 We retire this stripe in memory of those who shed their blood in the name of hope and freedom in The Great War, we salute you.

#6 For our fathers and sons who died in the terrible battles of World War Two, Pearl Harbor, Anzio, Midway, The Bulge, Iwo Jima, Guadalcanal, Normandy, and Berlin, we salute you.

#7 To the men of the First Marine Division, who, in a rear guard action at the Chosin Reservoir in Korea saved tier battalion and the lives of their brother Marines, we salute you.

#8 For the brave men and women of our armed forces who died on the fields of fire in Vietnam and whose names will live on forever on that hallowed wall, we salute you.

#9 For our commander in chief, who leads our nation in good times, and bad, we salute you.

#10 For the Boy Scouts of America and all the Scouts who have gone before us, we salute you.

#11 To God, our parents and our families who we love and respect, we salute you.

#12 To the men and women of our armed forces, the Arsenal of Democracy and the Hammer of Freedom, we salute you.

#13 And last, to freedom, because with out freedom there is no honor, without honor, we are not Americans, and on this we vow, that as long as this flag flies, we salute you.

Blue Field: After the last stripe is burned, the color guard captain gives the blue field to the speaker. the speaker says: "And last we retire this blue field upon which are the fifty stars that represent the states of the greatest nation that God in his wisdom put upon this earth we don this with honor, dignity, and respect." The speaker and the color guard captain salute slowly. Then the speaker orders: "All Scouts salute. Bugler sound your Taps.

Speaker orders: "Color guard retreat." Color guard is dismissed. Color guard is drummed back as they retreat.

Speaker says: "You have just witnessed the most solemn ceremony associated with the American flag. This is the only time the American flag is burned. All please leave the quadrangle in silence and with the proper respect to the greatest nation on Earth and the flag which is its symbol."

## Flag Retirement #9

1. Display the old flag, give its history, if known. Also recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. 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.

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. Then ABSOLUTE SILENCE.

4. Color Guard cuts the field of blue stars out of the flag, with solemnity a quiet. This field of flue 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.'

Group says together: Pledge of Allegiance then sing America (my Country Tis of Thee)

Color of the flag: Remember as you look at your Flag, which is the symbol of our nation, that it is red because of human sacrifice. It is blue because of the true blue loyalty of its defenders. It is white to symbolize liberty -our land of the free. The stars are symbols of the united efforts and hope in the hearts of many people striving for a greater nobler America.

Hold the Flag Up:

Sing: Another appropriate song may be sung (optional)

Procedure for Flag Burning: (a pair of scissors should be on hand)

Take the flag and unfold. Place stars (as audience sees it) in the upper left hand corner. (One minute of silent meditation may be inserted if desired).

COMPLETE SILENCE

Then either cut or tear the position of the blue containing the stars from the flag. Have one person hold the blue in her arms until the end of the ceremony because the blue and stars is the last part of the flag to be burned. Now tear one stripe off at a time. burn it in the fire by laying it across the flames; not in a lump. Burn each stripe thoroughly before tearing off the next stripe to be burned. After all the stripes have been burned, one at a time, then the blue and stars is ready to be burned. BEFORE the blue and stars is spread across the fire, the blue portion should be KISSED for respect by the person holding the blue throughout the ceremony.

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.

Sing - Star Spangled Banner; or other appropriate song.

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

If the flag to be burned is small or there is more than one flag to be burned at a time, the flag may (but not necessarily advised unless due to lack of time) be laid as a whole unit across the fire. This can be done also if the first flag is torn and burned as describe above, and another laid across the first one at a time.

Nothing should ever be added to the ceremonial fire after the Flag has been burned (out of respect).

The next morning the scouts that actually burned the flag and their leader will gather the ashes to be burned.

This could be included as the last step in the ceremony if the wanted all of those in attendance to participate.

A hole is dug, the dirt placed carefully beside it and the ashes are placed into the hole by handfuls. Fill the hole back up with dirt, a marker can be placed.

At the beginning of the ceremony the speaker should say who the flag grommets will be given to. They are a form of good luck can be carried or worn around the neck of the person who receives one.

If the ashes are neatly out, they can be carried to the burial site in a box, if the ashes are still hot, a bucket could be used, then place by shovels-full into the hole.

A Scout's Own could be an appropriate ending for your Flag burning ceremony.

## **Flag Retirement #10**

Contributed by: Brian Mileschosky on rec.scouting.

Lower the colors or unfold the flag.

Tear off stripes one at a time, (we had to cut) saying one statement with each stripe.

Our flag has been used so much, that it is no longer a fitting emblem to display, so we are respectfully burning it.

FIRST STRIPE: The 13 stripes stand for the original 13 colonies which are:

Massachusetts, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Delaware, Maryland, North 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, insure domestic tranquillity, 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."

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." Each state is being represented by a star on a field of blue, which signifies a new constellation being formed.

As we place it into the fire, let it burn brightly and remind us how truly our flag represents our country.

Will you please join us in saying the Pledge of Allegiance and sing The Star Spangled Banner and then Taps.

## **Flag Retirement #11**

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 it's 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 -- your's and mine.

As the fire consumes the worn and tattered material in it's 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 Retirement #12

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.

## Flag Retirement #13

### Advance Preparation:

Prepare the worn flag by cutting off the supporting edge, and cutting the remaining flag into about 24 pieces (more or less, depending on the size of the flag and the number of people who will be attending). Cut one of the stars from a piece of the blue field, and cut a bit of a red and a white stripe. 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. Group five key pieces (the standing edge, star and blue field and two pieces of stripes) so that they can be located easily, perhaps by fastening them together with a large safety pin. Fold all of the pieces into a properly folded American Flag which will convey the worn flag to the ceremony.

Prepare a cassette tape recording of the National Anthem with about 5 seconds of blank leader and a minute or two of blank trailer. Have a tape player with the volume set and player positioned so that the tape can be started from your speaking position without fumbling.

Prepare a modest fire lay, such as a council fire approximately 18 inches square by 12 inches high.

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

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.

### Ceremony:

[Leader and Color Guard take place at the side of the ceremony area]

[Leader, take place behind the fire, facing the audience.] “When the 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 that the flag is reduced to ashes unrecognizable as a former flag.

“This duty may be carried out less ceremoniously than we will do here, and it need not be more ceremonious. It is, I believe, important that the assembled group be participants rather than spectators. I, therefore, ask you to serve as Honor Guards for this ceremony. On command, please form a circle around the fire so that the Color Guards are a part of your circle.

“I hope that you will find this ceremony as moving as I did when I first experienced it.

“Color Guard, Advance!” [Color Guard forms a line behind the fire, occupying as much space as they will require to unfold the flag.]

“Honor Guard, Assemble” [Wait until the group completes the circle.]

“Color Guard, Present the Colors!” [Color Guard carefully unfolds the flag. Extra members of the Color Guard may support the center of the flag. Flag is left approximately level position.]

### Alternative 1 (4 Color Guards):

[When the flag has been unfolded, remove the five key pieces. The two Color Guards who are not holding the flag distribute the cut pieces of flag to the Honor Guards. The pieces should be pressed firmly into the hands of the Honor Guards. Pieces may be retained for each of the Color Guards.]

### Alternative 2 (2 Color Guards):

[When the flag has been unfolded, remove a bundle of pieces.] “Honor Guard, please file by and take a piece of the flag back to your position.” [Carefully give each person a piece of the flag until all are distributed. Withhold the five key pieces. You may also withhold pieces for the Color Guard.]

“I will place these pieces in different parts of the fire so that each can burn fully and easily. Here is the standing edge [place it firmly in the fire]... a piece of a red stripe... a piece of a white stripe... a piece of the blue field... and one of the stars...

[When placing the pieces into the fire, hold them as far into the fire as possible to prevent them from blowing away. Do so with sufficient exaggeration that the Honor Guard will recognize that you are trying to set an example for them.]

“Honor Guard, two by two, in an orderly manner, starting on each side of the Color Guard, please place your piece(s) of the flag carefully on the fire.” [Color Guards should fold the Colors. Then wait, at attention, until the last pieces of flag have been placed on the fire. If the Color Guards have pieces of flag to place in the fire, they may do so when the Honor Guard finishes.

(The folded flag may be given to the leader to hold while they do this.) Start the tape player.]

2. “Scouts and Scouters, Salute!” [Wait for the Anthem to complete.]

“Two!... Color Guard, Dismiss!... [Wait for the Color Guard to withdraw from the circle.]

2. “Honor Guard, Dismiss!” [Stop the tape player.]