

Flag Retirement Ceremony

PARTICIPANTS:

Unit Leader: The acting Cubmaster for a Cub Scout Pack, the acting Senior Patrol Leader for a Boy Scout Troop, or the Crew President for a Venturing Crew.

Retirement MC: The Den Leader of the participating den for a Cub Scout Pack or a senior Den Leader if more than one den is participating. The acting Patrol Leader of the participating patrol for a Boy Scout Troop or a member of the Troop leadership chosen by the Senior Patrol Leader if more than one patrol is participating. A member of the Crew leadership chosen by the Crew President for a Venturing Crew.

Color Guard Members: An even numbered group of four to eight Scouts, depending on the size of the flag, chosen by the person acting as the Retirement MC from the eligible participants identified by the Unit Leader. The group could be a Cub Scout Den, a Webelos Den, an entire Pack, a Boy Scout patrol, a Boy Scout Troop, or a Venturing Crew.

MATERIALS and GUIDELINES:

All participants should be in full Class A uniform. For Webelos Scouts this should include the Webelos activity colors if used by the Den. For Boy Scouts this should include either the Merit Badge Sash or the OA Sash (not both). Avoid any dangling items that could be easily ignited.

The flags to be retired. 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.

Materials to build a modest fire that is large enough to consume the largest flag or flag remnant that will be placed into the fire. This fire should have been allowed to burn for some time so that a bed of coals has been produced that will fully consume the flag. The fire should be blazing. Adding some small pieces of cedar or another fast burning wood that produces a cheerful flame is advised just prior to beginning the ceremony. The Retirement MC should be responsible for the tending of the fire just prior to the start of the ceremony. Depending on the setting, it may also be necessary to have a burn barrel to keep the fire above the ground. Check the regulations in force at the site where you are conducting the ceremony.

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Follow Leave No Trace fire impact guidelines, all fire safety guidelines, and obey all applicable laws. Take note that flags made from nylon ignite very quickly, burn very hot, and release innocuous gases as they burn. Subsequently the fire should be placed far enough away to keep the audience out of the primary smoke path of the fire and the color guard should plan to stand out of the smoke path after placing these flags into the fire. Also be aware that it is illegal to burn nylon in some states and municipalities so check local regulations for burning flags made of this material. It may also be necessary to obtain a burn permit or other permits from local municipalities before igniting the crematory fire.

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BEGINNING OF THE 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 it's 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.

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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 through out our nations 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 when ever 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.

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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.

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*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.)