

Flag Retirement Ceremony

Introduction: When a flag is worn beyond repair, it should be retired in a dignified manner. The most accepted manner is to cut the blue field of stars from the red and white stripes, thereby rendering it no longer a flag. The resulting two pieces of cloth are then burned in one or two separate fires that are used for nothing else except the retirement ceremony. The pieces of cloth should be thoroughly burned so that nothing is left that is recognizable as a flag. The ashes should be scattered or buried.

The following is originally written by Boy Scout Troop 849 with original authors being unknown. This ceremony works best when many people are present and has been modified by Josh Horan of Troop 344.

Prepare for the ceremony by building one or two fires and lighting them ahead of time. The end of an evening campfire is a natural time to retire a flag.

Announcer: "Tonight we are going to retire an old flag which has become worn beyond repair. The correct way to do this is to cut the flag into two pieces of cloth, separating the blue field of stars from the red and white stripes. *If the flag is very large, add "Due to the size of this flag, the red and white stripes will then be cut into two pieces"*. The pieces of cloth that were once a flag will then be burned until they have been completely turned into ashes. This is not a flag burning, but rather a flag retirement; a solemn ceremony to honor a worn symbol of the United States of America. *Pause* Please rise."

Color Guard: *Bring in the old/damaged flag, carefully unfold it and display it to the audience.*

Announcer: *Give a brief history of this flag if known*; "For over 200 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 a 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."

Announcer: "We are now going to recite the Pledge of Allegiance to this flag one last time. Please remove your hats, hand over your heart or scout salute if you are in uniform. Ready, begin. *Recite the pledge* "To." Please remain standing." *Pause*. "Color guard proceed"

Color Guard: *Carefully cut the blue field of stars from the stripes. Cut the stripes into two sections if the flag is very large (5'x8' or larger).*

Announcer.: "One final salute"

Color Guard: Place the pieces of cloth on the fire(s) and then salute. While the cloth is burning, a bugler if available should sound off playing 'Taps'.

Announcer: Wait until it is apparent that the cloth has been completely reduced to ashes "To." "This concludes our flag retirement ceremony. Thank you for your attention, you are dismissed."

Let the fire(s) burn until after the audience has left. They may then be extinguished. Remove any unburned pieces of wood. Scatter the ashes in an appropriate place, either near the retirement ceremony area or transport them to a more appropriate place. The ashes may also be buried.