

## **The Story of the Stars & Stripes** **By the US Marine Corps**

The story of the origin of our national flag parallels the story of the origin of our country. As our country received its birthright from the peoples of many lands who were gathered on these shores to found a new nation, so did the pattern of the Stars and Stripes rise from several origins back in the mists of antiquity to become emblazoned on the standards of our infant Republic.

The star is a symbol of the heavens and the divine goal to which man has aspired from time immemorial; the stripe is symbolic of the rays of light emanating from the sun.

Both themes have long been represented on the standards of nations, from the banners of the astral worshippers of ancient Egypt and Babylon to the 12-starred flag of the Spanish Conquistadors under Cortez. Continuing in favor, they spread to the striped standards of Holland and the West Indian Company in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and to the present patterns of stars and stripes on the flags of several nations of Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

The first flags adopted by our Colonial forefathers were symbolic of their struggles with the wilderness of a new land. Beavers, pine trees, rattlesnakes, anchors, and various like insignia with mottoes such as “Hope”, “Liberty”, “Appeal to Heaven” or “Don’t Tread on Me” were affixed to the different banners of Colonial America.

The first flag of the colonists to have any resemblance to the present Stars and Stripes was the Grand Union flag, sometimes referred to as the “Congress Colors”. It consisted of thirteen stripes, alternately red and white, representing the Thirteen Colonies, with a blue field in the upper left hand corner bearing the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew, signifying union with the mother country. This banner was first flown by the ships of the Colonial Fleet in the Delaware River in December 1775.

The Grand Union flag was the standard of the Continental Army when the latter came into being in January, 1776, and was also carried by Marines and American Blue-jackets comprising an expeditionary force in the West Indies during that year.

During the previous year a canton (section) of thirteen stripes appeared on the yellow silk standard of the Philadelphia troop of Light Horse when the latter served as an escort to General Washington who was journeying to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to assume command of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and New Hampshire volunteers.

Many Americans still believe that Betsy Ross made the first flag, although historians dispute this story. Another disputed story is that the first Stars and Stripes displayed in the face of an armed enemy was at Fort Schuyler, August 3, 1777. The flag was improvised. The white part came from a soldier’s shirt; a captain’s cloak supplied the blue of the union; and the red stripes came from the flannel petticoat of a soldier’s wife, who gladly donated it for the purpose. However, this was probably a Grand Union flag.

Continental Congress passed a resolution that established the Stars and Stripes on June 14, 1777, but did not specify the arrangement of the thirteen stars on the blue union, except to say that they should represent a new constellation. As a consequence we find a variety of forms. The first Army flag, popularly known as the Betsy Ross flag, had the stars arranged in a circle, based on the idea that no colony should take precedence.

The first Navy Stars and Stripes had the stars arranged in staggered formation in alternate lines and rows of threes and twos on a blue field. A close inspection of this arrangement of the stars shows a distinct outline of the diagonal X-shaped cross and the cross of St. George of the English flag. This indicates how difficult it was for the colonists, even at this late date, to break away entirely from the British flag under which they had been born and had lived all the years of their lives.

The Resolution of June 14, 1777, establishing the Stars and Stripes has an interesting history. After the Declaration of Independence, colonial vessels were putting to sea to hamper enemy communications and prey on British commerce. Many of them flew the flags of the particular Colonies to which they belonged. It was necessary to provide an authorized national flag under which they could sail, for England considered armed vessels without such a flag as pirate ships and hanged their crews when they captured them. So the Marine Committee of the Second Continental Congress presented the Resolution, which was on the subject of the Navy.

General Washington when the Star-Spangled Banner was first flown by the Continental Army, is said to have described its symbolism as follows: "We take the stars from heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing liberty."

After the admission of Kentucky and Vermont, a resolution was adopted in January, 1794, making the flag one of fifteen stars and stripes.

Realizing that the flag would become unwieldy with a stripe for each new State, Captain Samuel C. Reid, USN, suggested to Congress that the stripes remain thirteen in number to represent the Thirteen Colonies, and that a star be added to the blue field for each new State coming into the Union. A law of April 4, 1818, that resulted requires that a star be added for each new State on the 4th of July after its admission.

A 48- star flag came with admission of Arizona and New Mexico in 1912. Alaska added a 49<sup>th</sup> star in 1959, and Hawaii paved the way for 50 stars in 1960.

Following the War of 1812, a great wave of nationalistic spirit spread throughout the country; the infant Republic had successfully defied the might of an empire. As this spirit spread, the Stars and Stripes began to take on the characteristics of a mighty symbol of sovereignty. The homage paid the banner is best expressed by what the gifted men of later generations wrote concerning it.

The brilliant Henry Ward Beecher said: “A thoughtful mind when it sees a nation’s flag, sees not the flag, but the nation itself. And whatever may be its symbols, its insignia, he reads chiefly in the flag, the government, the principles, the truths, the history that belong to the nation that sets it forth. The American flag has been a symbol of Liberty and men rejoiced in it.

“The stars upon it were like the bright morning stars of God, and the stripes upon it were beams of morning light. As at early dawn the stars shine forth even while it grows light, and then as the sun advances that light breaks into banks and streaming lines of color, the glowing red and intense white, striving together, and ribbing the horizon with bars effulgent, so, on the American flag, stars and beams of many-colored light shine out together

In a 1917 Flag Day message, President Wilson said:

“This flag, which we honor and under which we serve, is the emblem of our unity, our power, our thought and purpose as a nation. It has no other character than that which we give it from generation to generation. The choices are ours. It floats in majestic silence above the hosts that execute those choices, whether in peace or in war. And yet, though silent, it speaks to us—speaks to us of the past, of the men and women who went before us, and of the records they wrote upon it.

“We celebrate the day of its birth; and from its birth until now it has witnessed a great history, has floated on high the symbol of great events, of a great plan of life worked out by a great people....

‘Woe be to the man or group of men that seeks to stand in our way in this day of high resolution when every principle we hold dearest is to be vindicated and made secure for the salvation of the nation. We are ready to plead at the bar of history, and our flag shall wear a new luster. Once more we shall make good with our lives and fortunes the great faith to which we were born, and a new glory shall shine in the face of our people.’”

Thus the Stars and Stripes came into being; born amid the strife of battle, it became the standard around which a free people struggled to found a great nation. Its spirit is fervently expressed in the words of Thomas Jefferson:

‘I swear, before the altar of God, eternal hostility to every form of tyranny over the mind of man.’”

The Stars and Stripes, which in 1941 flew over the United States Capitol on December 8 when we declared war on Japan and on December 11 when we declared war on Germany and Italy, has indeed proved to be the ‘flag of liberation’. This same flag went with President Roosevelt to Algiers, Casablanca and other historic places, and flew over the conquered cities of Rome, Berlin and Tokyo.

The Stars and Stripes that flew over Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, rippled above

the United Nations Charter meeting at San Francisco and over the Big Three conference at Potsdam. This same flag was flying over the White House on August 14, 1945, when the Japanese accepted surrender terms.



### Early American Flags

Heraldry is as old as the human race, and the carrying of banners has been the habit of nations since the beginning of time.

Some years ago in northern India, Sir John Marshall, head of the archeological service of the government of India, discovered two abandoned cities; one at a site now called Mohenjo-Daro, the other at Harappa. These cities are believed to have thrived about 3,500 B.C. and were in close contact with the earliest civilizations of Babylonia. Among the objects found in the former city was a seal, used to sign documents, showing a procession of seven men carrying square standards, held aloft on poles like modern flags. These ancient "flags" were not made of cloth but were rigid solids, like boards.

Far back in American history, the Vikings carried a flag which bore a black raven on a field of white.

Then in 1492, Columbus sailed to our shores, and his three small ships displayed the Spanish flag bearing two red lions on two white fields and two yellow castles on two red fields.

It is most natural that America should have had its colonial flags as soon as the first colonists settled. And it is not surprising that those flags should have been created in a wide variety.

The Dutch brought their own striped flags when they settled in New Amsterdam, which we now call New York, and pioneers from other nations also brought along the standards of their countries when they settled on our shores.

The American colonists did not just use “the British flag”. Puritans in the New England colonies objected to the cross of St. George and St. Andrew on the British Red Ensign as one of the “idolatrous remnants of popery”. As a result they adopted their own flags. Eventually, the pine tree flag was widely used in New England.

This flag is represented by the canton of the Grand Union flag. For centuries the flag of England was the red cross of St. George on a white field and the flag of Scotland was the white cross of St. Andrew on a blue field.

The first Union Flag was adopted in 1606 and was a combination of the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew. Various other flags were also used at this time. The official Union Flag was not adopted until 1801 when St. Patrick’s Cross was added to the flag, thus representing England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Our separation from the mother country came gradually, and it was only by degrees that the union flag of Great Britain was discarded. The final breach between the Colonies and Great Britain brought about the removal of the union from the canton of our striped flag and the substitution of stars in a blue field.

Back in the days of the Revolution there were colonial or regimental flags by the score. While the pine tree was a popular design, there were numerous other symbols, such as beavers, anchors and rattlesnakes, or combinations of these symbols, with appropriate slogans.

In early accounts of colonial activities, liberty poles and trees bear an important part. A fine old elm in Hanover Square, Boston, where the Sons of Liberty met, was known as the Liberty Tree.

A widespread live oak in Charleston, South Carolina, made a shelter under which the leading patriots of the day gathered to discuss political questions, and there the Declaration of Independence was first read to the people of the city.

When in 1652 the colony of Massachusetts first established a mint, the general court ordained that all pieces of money should bear on one side a tree, thus bringing into being the famous pinetree shillings.

Later a white flag with a green pine tree and the inscription 'An Appeal to Heaven' became familiar on the seas as the ensign of cruisers commissioned by General Washington, a fact noted by many English newspapers of that time.

Meanwhile the rattlesnake theme was gaining increasing prestige with the colonists; eventually a coiled serpent at the foot of the tree was added to the pine tree design. The slogan "Don't Tread on Me" almost invariably appeared on rattlesnake flags. The rattlesnake symbol appears again and again in early American flags. A flag of this type was the standard of the South Carolina Navy; one of its variants was the emblem of the Culpeper Minute Men of Virginia; and still another, the rattlesnake superimposed on a plain yellow banner, was known as the Gadsden flag.

One writer of the time quaintly stated that as the rattlesnake's eye exceeded in brightness that of any other animal, and she had no eyelids, she might therefore be esteemed a symbol of vigilance; that inasmuch as she never began an attack, nor, when once engaged, ever surrendered, she was therefore an emblem of magnanimity and true courage.

It was probably the deadly bite of the rattler, however, which was foremost in the minds of its designers, and the threatening slogan 'Don't Tread on Me' added further significance to the design.

The Moultrie flag was the first distinctive American flag displayed in the South. It flew over the ramparts of the fort on Sullivan's Island, which lies in the channel leading to Charleston, South Carolina, when the British fleet, under the command of Sir Peter Parker, attacked on June 28, 1776. The British ships opened fire at about 10:30 a.m. and continued the bombardment for approximately ten hours, but the garrison, consisting of some 375 regulars and a few militia, under the command of Colonel William Moultrie, put up such a gallant defense that the British were forced to withdraw under cover of darkness. This victory not only saved the southern Colonies from invasion for some two years but marked the first defeat of a British naval force for a period of years. The design of this large blue flag with a white crescent in the upper corner next to the staff was suggested by the blue uniforms of the garrison and the silver crescents, which the men wore on their caps, inscribed with the words 'Liberty or Death'.

The maritime state of Rhode Island had its own flag, which was carried at Brandywine, Trenton and Yorktown. It bore an anchor, thirteen stars and the word 'Hope', and its white stars in a blue field are believed by many to have suggested the "starry blue field" of our National flag.

There were a number of other famous New England flags, and noteworthy among them was the Bunker Hill. This flag, which was one of the first to include the pine tree, was one of those carried by the American colonial troops who opposed the British Regulars at the Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775.

Strikingly similar to the Stars and Stripes was the flag carried by the Green Mountain

Boys at the Battle of Bennington on August 16, 1777. It has been claimed that this flag was the true forerunner of the Stars and Stripes and that our National flag was fashioned after the pattern of the Bennington flag, but there appears to be nothing in the written history of the flag that would verify this claim.

All of these flags and scores of others disappeared soon after the Stars and Stripes was adopted, yet the insignia shown on some of them was retained in some cases and now appears occasionally on State flags.

The President of the United States issued on June 12, 1961, a proclamation which calls for the American flag to be flown night and day at the Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, across the Potomac River from the Nation's Capitol.

The proclamation cites the Iwo Jima campaign as one of the most significant and costly battles of World War II. It points out that the American flag-raising on Mt. Suribachi on February 23, 1945, is a symbol of the courage and valor of the American fighting forces in war.

The American flag is now flown 24 hours a day at four places in the United States, authorized by presidential Proclamation. They are: Fort McHenry, Maryland; Flaghouse Square, Baltimore; the Capitol and the Marine Corps Memorial.

### **Old Glory and the US Marines**

- \* Landed in the Bahamas on March 3, 1776, on their first expedition, bringing ashore with them the Grand Union flag and a Rattlesnake flag.
- \* Helped to defend the flag in the sea fight between the Bon Homme Richard and the Serapis, September 23, 1779, when John Paul Jones made his defiant retort: "I have not yet begun to fight"
- \* Carried the Stars and Stripes to the "Shores of Tripoli" where it was hoisted at Deme, April 27, 1805, the first time our flag was flown over a fortress of the Old World
- \* Took part in the defense of Fort McHenry during the night of September 13 1814 where on the following morning our flag inspired Francis Scott Key to write the Star Spangled Banner.
- \* Raised Old Glory to the breeze over the Custom House at Monterey California while U S naval vessels in the harbor fired a twenty one gun salute on July 7 1846
- \* Marched with General Quitman's division when it entered the Halls of Montezuma in Mexico City and hoisted the Stars and Stripes on September 14 1847
- \* Unfurled the National flag at Guantanamo Bay Cuba when they landed there on June 10 1898 and held the surrounding terrain as a base for the U S Navy
- \* Accepted surrender of the island of Guam when along with the bluejackets of the U S Navy they witnessed the lowering of the Spanish flag and raised the Stars and Stripes June 30 1898
- \* Took part in the special ceremonies when the Stars and Stripes were first raised over American Samoa in the Samoan Islands on April 17 1900
- \* As a part of the Allied Relief Expedition who raised the siege of the Allied Legations in China during the Boxer Rebellion, in July and August 1900, hoisted the Stars and Stripes over the Walled City of Tientsin in July 1900, and over the Tarter City (Pekin) wall in August 1900.
- \* Marines carried our flag in France during World War I (1918) from the defense of Aisne, through the battle of Belleau Wood, Soissons, St. Mihiel, MeuseArgonne and into Germany for occupation duty.
- \* On August 7, 1942, the Stars and Stripes were flown over Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, in the first offensive of American forces in the Second World War.
- \* After Guadalcanal, the Marines planted the Stars and Stripes on Bougainville and Tarawa,

November 1943; Cape Gloucester, December 1943; Marshall Islands, February 1944; Marianas Islands, June and July 1944; Pelellu, September 1944; Iwo Jima February 1945 Okinawa April 1945 and Japan August 1945

- \* As a part of United Nations forces in Korea, 1950-1953, Marines carried our flag from the Pusan Perimeter north through Inchon-Seoul to the Chosin Reservoir and Hamhung.
- \* The Stars and Stripes accompanied Marines of the landing force of the 6th Fleet when they landed in Lebanon on 15 July 1958 to protect the legally constituted government of Lebanon against the possibility of outside aggression
- \* It was present when 2d Marine Division troops joined Marine Security Guard personnel in protecting Americans and restoring order to the strife torn Dominican Republic in 1965.
- And the Stars and Stripes were there when Marines were the first ground troops to land in force in Vietnam in 1965 flew over Con Then in 1967 Hue City and Khe Sanh in 1968.



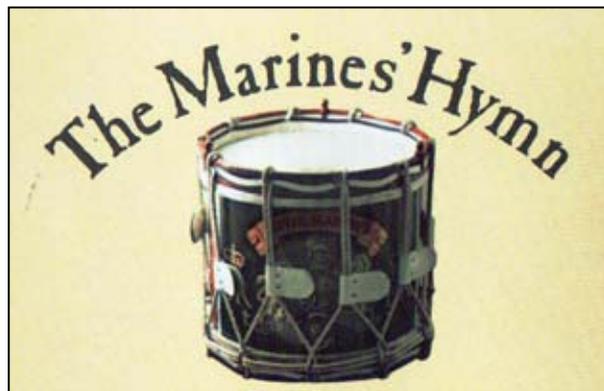
Steeped in honor and tradition is the official U.S. Marine Corps Standard, shown side by side with the American Flag, during formal ceremonies at Marie Barracks, Washington D.C. "The streamers borne on the staff of the Battle Standard of the Marine Corps represent all honors bestowed upon Marine Corps units as well as all wars and campaigns in which the Marine Corps has participated."

Throughout the United States, at U.S. bases overseas, at American Embassies in foreign lands, United States Marines perform the official honors to the American flag. Around the globe the Stars and Stripes fly at more than 500 stations where Marines are on duty.

### The Marine Emblem



Fouled anchors, scarlet plumes, eagles and other insignia were once worn by the U.S. Marines as a mark of identification, and in 1804, a brass hat plate, bearing an eagle, was the current device of the Corps. Early in 1840 officers and enlisted men wore hats adorned with a gold wreath encircling the letters, "U.S.M.", while just before the Civil War this device had evolved in a U.S. Shield, resting in a half-wreath, with the letter "M" placed within the ring of a bugle. Finally, in 1868, came the badge which has marked the Marine Corps up to the present day: the eagle, globe and anchor, shown here. Its designers were guided by tradition in retaining the eagle and anchor, but the addition of the western hemisphere appears to have been an inspiration of the moment. For official use, the Marines' motto, "Semper Fidelis", appears on a streamer above the eagle.



From the Halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli;  
We fight our country's battles in the air, on land, and sea;  
First to fight for right and Freedom and to keep our honor clean;  
We are proud to claim the title of UNITED STATES MARINE.

Our flag's unfurled to every breeze from dawn to setting sun;  
We have fought in every clime and place where we could take a gun;  
In the snow of far-off northern lands and in sunny tropic scenes;  
You will find us always on the job – THE UNITED STATES MARINES.

Here's health to you and to our Corps which we are proud to serve;  
In many a strife we've fought for life and never lost our nerve;  
If the Army and the Navy ever look on heaven's scenes;  
They will find the streets are guarded by UNITED STATES MARINES.



At last the faint gray of dawn appeared. They could see that some flag was flying, but it was too dark to tell which. More and more eagerly they gazed. It grew lighter, a sudden breath of wind caught the flag, and it floated out on the breeze. It was no English flag, it was their own Stars and Stripes. The fort had stood, the city was safe. Then it was that Frances Scott Key took from his pocket an old letter and on the back of it he wrote the poem, "The Star-Spangled Banner."

### **The Star-Spangled Banner**

Oh, say, can you see, by the dawn's early light,  
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?  
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, thro' the perilous fight,  
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming.  
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,  
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.  
Oh, say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

On the shore dimly seen, thro' the mists of the deep,  
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,  
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,  
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?  
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,  
In full glory reflected, now shines on the stream;  
'Tis the star-spangled banner; oh, long may it wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Oh, thus be it ever when freemen shall stand,  
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation;  
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n-rescued land  
Praise the Power that has made and preserved us a nation.  
Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,  
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust";  
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave  
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.



I Am Old Glory: For more than nine score years I have been the banner of hope and freedom for generation after generation of Americans. Born amid the first flames of Americas fight for freedom, I am the symbol of a country that has grown from a little group of thirteen colonies to a united nation of fifty\* 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.

\*(Updated) Originally written by Marine Master Sergeant Percy Webb (1879-1945). Sergeant Webb wrote this famous flag tribute in the original Our Flag booklet first distributed at the Chicago Wends Fair, 1933.



The Grand Union flag, sometimes called the "First Navy Ensign" and the "Cambridge Flag", among other designations, was the immediate predecessor of the Stars and Stripes. This type of flag was carried on the flagship "Alfred" on December 3, 1775, as the naval ensign of the Thirteen Colonies, after Commodore Esek Hopkins assumed command of the Navy built by Congress. It was hoisted by General Washington in January 1776, at Cambridge Camp, Prospect Hill, Mass.. as the standard of the Continental Army, and it was also carried ashore by the Marines who made an expedition to the Bahamas in March of 776. As the flag of the Revolution, it was used on many occasions before June 14, 1777, when the Continental Congress authorized the Stars and Stripes. The canton, with its crosses of St. George and St. Andrew, indicated our relation with the "mother country" until the severance of those ties brought about its replacement with the white stars in a blue field. Washington later wrote that it was flown at Cambridge "out of compliment to the United Colonies".



The Stars and Stripes, whose birthday we observe on June 14, was created on that date, in 1777, when the Continental Congress resolved: "That the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white: that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation." The first Army flag had the stars arranged in a circle presumably based on the idea that no colony should take precedence. The first Navy Stars and Stripes, flown by the man-of-war "Guerriere" when she sailed from Boston on July 25, 1818, for Cowes, England, had the stars arranged in staggered formation in alternate lines and rows of threes and twos on the field of blue. However, on September 9, 1818, the Board of Navy Commissioners received a directive from President Monroe that "the Flag of the United States shall conform to the pattern, herewith transmitted, viz: twenty stars in a blue union, and thirteen stripes, red and white, alternately, according to the Act of Congress passed on the fourth of April last; of which you will please to give due notice to the Naval Commanders, and the necessary directions for making the Flags."



Following an Act of Congress on January 13, 1794, this was the flag of our country from 1795 until 1818. The addition of the two stars and two stripes came with the admission of Vermont, March 4, 1791, and Kentucky, June 1, 1792, into the Union. This type of flag figured in many stirring episodes. It inspired Francis Scott Key to write the "Star-Spangled Banner"; it was the first flag to be hoisted over a fortress of the Old World, when Lieutenant Presley N. O'Bannon, of the Marine Corps, and Midshipman Mann, of the Navy, raised it above the Tripolitan stronghold in Deme. Tripoli, on April 27, 1805; it was our ensign in the Battle of Lake Erie; and was flown by General Jackson at New Orleans. Fearing that too many stripes would spoil the true design of the flag, Congress passed a law on April 4, 1818, returning the flag to its original design of thirteen stripes and providing for a new star to be added to the blue field as additional States came into the Union. Thus, for nearly a quarter of a century, this flag with its fifteen stars and stripes was the banner of our growing Nation.

## Other Approved Customs

Highest honors are rendered to the National flag by all branches of the Armed Forces and the various patriotic societies throughout the country. More than fifty years ago it was the custom to salute the National flag by uncovering; nowadays the hand salute is rendered by the entire personnel of the Armed Forces.

During the ceremony of hoisting or lowering the flag, or when the flag is passing in a parade or in a review, those present in uniform should render the right-hand salute. When not in uniform, men should remove their headdress with the right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart; women should place the right hand over the heart.

It is the universal custom to display the flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flag-staffs in the open. However, when a patriotic effect is desired, the flag may be displayed 24 hours a day if properly illuminated during the hours of darkness.

The flag should be displayed on all days, especially on New Year's Day, January 1; Inauguration Day, January 20; Lincoln's Birthday, February 12; Washington's Birthday, third Monday in February; Easter Sunday (variable); Mother's Day, second Sunday in May; Armed Forces Day, third Saturday in May; Memorial Day (half-staff until noon), the last Monday in May; Flag Day, June 14; Independence Day, July 4; Labor Day, first Monday in September; Constitution Day, September 17; 7; Columbus Day, second Monday in October; Navy Day, October 27; Veterans Day, November 11; Thanksgiving Day, fourth Thursday in November; Christmas Day, December 25; and such other days as may be proclaimed by the President of the United States; the birthdays of States (date of admission); and on State holidays.

The flag should not be displayed on days when the weather is inclement, except when an all-weather flag is displayed.

The custom of lowering the flag to half-mast or half-staff comes from the old military practice of - "Striking the Colors" in time of war as a sign of submission. It is known that as early as 1627 the flying of the flag at half-mast was a sign of mourning, and this has been continued to the present day.

If a serviceman or woman dies during a period of service, the flag is furnished by the Service. However, if he or she dies as an honorably discharged veteran, the flag is furnished by the Veterans Administration, Washington D.C., and may be procured from the nearest post office by executing properly Veterans Administration Form 2008. In filling out the application the person signing for the flag must state whether he is the next of kin or if another relative, giving kinship.

The flag must be presented to the next of kin at the proper time during the burial service. If there is no relative, or one cannot be located, the flag must be returned to the Veterans Administration in the franked container for that purpose.

Postmasters require proof of honorable discharge before issuing the flag. Flags are issued promptly upon proper evidence.

Many of the Nation's drycleaners, in cooperation with the American Legion, will dryclean the Nation flag free of charge between June 1 and 12, provided the owner of the flag promises to fly it on Flag Day, June 14.

When the flag is in such a condition, through wear or damage, that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, it should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.

On suitable occasions repeat this pledge to the flag:

“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.”

This wording of the pledge varies slightly from the original, which was drawn up in 1892 in the office of “the Youth’s Companion” in Boston. It was first used in the public schools in celebration of Columbus Day, October 12, 1892.

The pledge received official recognition by Congress in an Act of June 22, 1942. The phrase “under God” was added to the pledge by a Congressional Act of June 14, 1954. At that time, President Eisenhower said that “in this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource in peace and war.”



When the flag is used to cover a casket, it should be so placed that the union is at the head and over the left shoulder. The flag should not be lowered into the grave or allowed to touch the ground.

Pictured right: My mother, Geraldine Loftis Denny is being presented the USA flag at the funeral of my father, Tim Denny who was in WWII - US Army. Flag was presented by two Army soldiers on 6 August 2001.

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