



The American Flag

What do the Colors of the Flag mean?

The colors used in the flag of the United States of America:

White signifies purity and innocence;

Red signifies hardiness & valor; and

Blue, the color of the Chief signifies vigilance, perseverance & justice.

The gold fringe on a Flag is considered an 'honorable enrichment only', used only for indoor flags, and its official use by the US Army dates from 1895.

FLAG ETIQUETTE

Standards of Respect

The Flag Code, which formalizes and unifies the traditional ways in which we give respect to the flag, also contains specific instructions on how the flag is not to be used. They are:

- The flag should never be dipped to any person or thing. It is flown upside down only as a distress signal.
- The flag should never be carried flat or horizontally, but always aloft and free.

Is displaying the flag horizontally, as before a football game, a violation?

Yes. It is contrary to the Flag Code, Section 8c, which reads the flag should never be carried flat or horizontally.

The flag should not be used as a drapery, or for covering a speaker's desk, draping a platform, or for any decoration in general. Bunting of blue, white and red stripes is available for these purposes. The blue stripe of the bunting should be on the top.

The flag should never be used for any advertising purpose. It should not be embroidered, printed or otherwise impressed on such articles as cushions, handkerchiefs, napkins, boxes, or anything intended to be discarded after temporary use. Advertising signs should not be attached to the staff or halyard.

The flag should not be used as part of a costume or athletic uniform, except that a flag patch may be used on the uniform of military personnel, fireman, policeman and members of patriotic organizations.

Where do you wear a lapel flag pin?

The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing. Therefore, the lapel flag pin being a replica should be worn on the left lapel near the heart.

The flag should never have placed on it, or attached to it, any mark, insignia, letter, word, number, figure, or drawing of any kind.

The flag should never be used as a receptacle for receiving, holding, carrying, or delivering anything.

When the flag is lowered, no part of it should touch the ground or any other object; it should be received by waiting hands and arms. To store the flag it should be folded neatly and ceremoniously.

Do I have to fold my flag in the triangular fold for storage between use?

No, for storage purposes, you may use the ordinary rectangular fold and, perhaps, place your flag in a plastic bag. If the flag is affixed to a staff, you may roll the flag around the staff for storage. The triangular fold is not required, but is traditional for display of the flag.

The flag should be cleaned and mended when necessary.

When a flag is so worn it is no longer fit to serve as a symbol of our country, it should be destroyed by burning in a dignified manner.

Note: Most American Legion Posts regularly conduct a dignified flag burning ceremony, often on Flag Day, June 14th.

Displaying the Flag Outdoors

When the flag is displayed from a staff projecting from a window, balcony, or a building, the union should be at the peak of the staff unless the flag is at half staff.

When it is displayed from the same flagpole with another flag - of a state, community, society or Scout unit - the flag of the United States must always be at the top except that the church pennant may be flown above the flag during church services for Navy personnel when conducted by a Naval chaplain on a ship at sea.

When the flag is displayed over a street, it should be hung vertically, with the union to the north or east. If the flag is suspended over a sidewalk, the flag's union should be farthest from the building.

When flown with flags of states, communities, or societies on separate flag poles which are of the same height and in a straight line, the flag of the United States is always placed in the position of honor - to its own right.

- The other flags may be smaller but none may be larger.
- No other flag ever should be placed above it.
- The flag of the United States is always the first flag raised and the last to be lowered.

When flown with the national banner of other countries, each flag must be displayed from a separate pole of the same height. Each flag should be the same size. They should be raised and lowered simultaneously. The flag of one nation may not be displayed above that of another nation.

Raising and Lowering the Flag

The flag should be raised briskly and lowered slowly and ceremoniously. Ordinarily it should be displayed only between sunrise and sunset. It should be illuminated if displayed at night.

The flag of the United States of America is saluted as it is hoisted and lowered. The salute is held until the flag is unsnapped from the halyard or through the last note of music, whichever is the longest.

Displaying the Flag Indoors

When on display, the flag is accorded the place of honor, always positioned to its own right. Place it to the right of the speaker or staging area or sanctuary. Other flags should be to the left.

The flag of the United States of America should be at the center and at the highest point of the group when a number of flags of states, localities, or societies are grouped for display.

When one flag is used with the flag of the United States of America and the staffs are crossed, the flag of the United States is placed on its own right with its staff in front of the other flag.

When displaying the flag against a wall, vertically or horizontally, the flag's union (stars) should be at the top, to the flag's own right, and to the observer's left.

Parading and Saluting the Flag

When carried in a procession, the flag should be to the right of the marchers. When other flags are carried, the flag of the United States may be centered in front of the others or carried to their right. When the flag passes in a procession, or when it is hoisted or lowered, all should face the flag and salute.

The Salute

According to the Flag Code, Americans should stand at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart. When not in uniform men should remove any non-religious headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Persons in uniform should remain silent, face the flag, and render the military salute. Those who are not U.S. citizens should stand at attention. Members of organizations in formation salute upon command of the person in charge. All such conduct toward the flag in a moving column should be rendered at the moment the flag passes.

Public Law No: 110-181 (Sec. 594) "Allows members and veterans who are present but not in uniform during the hoisting, lowering, or passing of the flag to render the military salute."

The Pledge of Allegiance and National Anthem

The pledge of allegiance should be rendered by standing at attention, facing the flag, and saluting.

When the national anthem is played or sung, citizens should stand at attention and salute at the first note and hold the salute through the last note. The salute is directed to the flag, if displayed, otherwise to the music.

Why do we stand and put our right hand on our hearts when we say the pledge of allegiance? And where did this tradition originate?

The original Bellamy salute, first described in 1892 by Francis Bellamy, who authored the original Pledge, began with a military salute, and after reciting the words "to the flag," the arm was extended toward the flag, palm-down.

Shortly thereafter, the pledge was begun with the right hand over the heart, and after reciting "to the Flag," the arm was extended toward the Flag, palm-down.

In World War II, the salute too much resembled the Nazi salute, so it was changed to keep the right hand over the heart throughout.

The Flag in Mourning

To place the flag at half staff, hoist it to the peak for an instant and lower it to a position half way between the top and bottom of the staff. The flag is to be raised again to the peak for a moment before it is lowered. On Memorial Day the flag is displayed at half staff until noon and at full staff from noon to sunset.

The flag is to be flown at half staff in mourning for designated, principal government leaders and upon presidential or gubernatorial order.

The flag, when flown at half-staff, should be first hoisted to the peak for an instant and then lowered to the half-staff position. The flag should be again raised to the peak before it is lowered for the day. On Memorial Day the flag should be displayed at half-staff until noon only, and then raised to the top of the staff. By order of the President, the flag shall be flown at half-staff upon the death of principal figures of the United States Government and the Governor of a State, territory, or possession, as a mark of respect to their memory. In the event of the death of other officials or foreign dignitaries, the flag is to be displayed at half-staff according to Presidential instructions or orders, or in accordance with recognized customs or practices not inconsistent with law.

In the event of the death of a present or former official of the government of any State, territory, or possession of the United States, or the death of a member of the Armed Forces from any State, territory, or possession who dies while serving on active duty, the Governor of that State, territory, or possession may proclaim that the National flag shall be flown at half-staff, and the same authority is provided to the Mayor of the District of Columbia with respect to present or former officials of the District of Columbia and members of the Armed Forces from the District of Columbia. The flag shall be flown at half-staff 30 days from the death of the President or a former President; 10 days from the day of death of the Vice President, the Chief Justice or a retired Chief Justice of the United States, or the Speaker of the House of Representatives; from the day of death until interment of an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, a Secretary of an executive or military department, a former Vice President, or the Governor of a State, territory, or possession; and on the day of death and the following day for a Member of Congress. The flag shall be flown at half-staff on Peace Officers Memorial Day, unless that day is also Armed Forces Day. As used in this subsection —

1. the term "**half-staff**" means the position of the flag when it is one-half the distance between the top and bottom of the staff

In addition to the Flag Code, Proclamation 3044 Section 5 states, "The heads of the several departments and agencies of the [federal] Government may direct that the flag of the United States be flown at half-staff on buildings, grounds, or naval vessels under their jurisdiction on occasions other than those specified herein which they consider proper, and that suitable military honors be rendered as appropriate."

Can the US flag be flown at half staff and the state flag flown underneath of it on the same pole?

Yes. The US flag should be at a point midway on the pole and the state flag should fly beneath it, this includes the POW/MIA flag.

How do you drape the flag on a casket?

Closed Casket: When the flag is used to drape a closed casket, it should be so placed that the union (blue field) is at the head and over the left shoulder of the deceased. It may be said that the flag is embracing the deceased who in life has served the flag.

Half Couch (Open): When the flag is used to drape a half-couch casket, it should be placed three layers to cover the closed half of the casket in such a manner that the blue field will be the top fold, next to the open portion of the casket on the deceased's left.

Full Couch (Open): When the flag is used to drape a full-couch casket, it should be folded in a triangular shape and placed in the center part of the head panel of the casket cap, just above the left shoulder of the deceased.

During a military commitment ceremony, the flag which was used to drape the casket is held waist high over the grave by the pallbearers and, immediately after the sounding of "**Taps**", is folded in accordance with regulations. It should not be lowered into the grave.

This custom began during the Napoleonic Wars (1796-1815). The dead carried from the field of battle on a caisson (box) were covered with a flag.

Exceptions to the Rules:

In any nation the national flag must be placed in a place of prominence. The flag code only applies to flags flown on American soil.

In foreign waters or to salute a foreign country, the U.S. Navy may fly the country's national flag on the masthead of the ship. This is not a violation of the flag code because the code only applies to civilians (not the Navy), and also because the stern and gaff of a ship are more prominent positions to fly a flag.

A church pennant may be flown above the American Flag if a church service is done by naval chaplains at sea for personnel of the Navy. After the service is over, the American Flag must again be placed in the prominent position.

The United Nations' headquarters may fly the flags of all 188 member nations in alphabetical order. Although it is technically located within the United States (banks of the East River in Manhattan), the headquarters is owned by all the members of the United Nations, so it is not considered to be American soil.

POW/MIA FLAG

Protocol for flying the POW/MIA flag

On one flagpole, the POW/MIA flag is flown below the American flag and above any state flag

On two flagpoles, the POW/MIA flag is flown on the same pole as the American flag, below the American flag (this pole should be to the flag's own right of the second pole). Any state flag should fly on the second pole.

On three flagpoles, the American flag should be flown on the pole located to the flag's own right, the POW/MIA flag should be flown on the middle pole, and any state flag should be flown on the pole to the (flag's own) left.

Why is the flag backwards on military uniforms?

Army Regulation 670-1, "Wear and Appearance of Army Uniforms and Insignia," updated most recently September 5, 2003, addresses explicitly the proper and lawful placement of the U.S. flag patch on the Army uniform.

The regulation states that when authorized for application to the proper uniform the American flag patch is to be worn, right or left shoulder, so that "the star field faces forward, or to the flag's own right. When worn in this manner, the flag is facing to the observer's right, and gives the effect of the flag flying in the breeze as the wearer moves forward. The appropriate replica for the right shoulder sleeve is identified as the 'reverse side flag'."

When worn on the sleeve of a military uniform, the flag should appear to be advancing and not retreating. Thus, if your patch is to be worn on your LEFT sleeve, use a left flag (normal). For patches worn on your RIGHT sleeve, use a "right" or "reversed field" flag.

What is the correct order of the flags of the Military Branches?

The correct order of precedence is:

- ARMY
- MARINE CORPS
- NAVY
- AIR FORCE
- COAST GUARD