



**UNITED STATES FLAG**

**POW/MIA FLAG**

**STATE FLAG**

**RETIREMENT and DISPOSAL CEREMONY**

**Performed By  
THE MINNESOTA PLATOON**

<http://condocat.home.att.net>

## Background ...

The five members of The Minnesota Platoon started the Military Salute Project in 2003. We added the Military Salute Reference Forum to our website in early 2004. Two of our members also participate in groups that conduct Flag Retirement ceremonies every year. Because they are Veterans of America's Armed Forces, their respective groups asked them to write a protocol for the events. One is conducted around Flag Day and another occurs in conjunction with Veterans Day.

When we added the *Color Guard & Honor Guard Protocol* section to our Reference Forum in 2005, we began receiving requests for suggestions about conducting Flag Retirement ceremonies from people who felt the popular protocols used by the American Legion and the Boy Scouts of America did not adequately fit their needs.

### **American Legion Ceremony for the Disposal of Unserviceable Flags**

[http://legion.org/?section=our\\_flag&subsection=flag\\_unserviceable&content=flag\\_ceremony](http://legion.org/?section=our_flag&subsection=flag_unserviceable&content=flag_ceremony)

### **U. S. Scouting Service Flag Retirement Ceremony**

<http://www.usscouts.org/ceremony/flagret1.html>

The protocol presented here represents a combination of the suggestions we have presented to a number of groups. We have adjusted it several times in the last year after receiving feedback from people who attended events we scripted and people who have conducted those events.

Your group may wish to delete some parts of this protocol or add others. It was our intention to encourage those in attendance to become involved in the proceedings instead of merely watching a trained Color Guard and Honor Guard perform the ceremony.

This protocol is based on several assumptions ...

- The event is being conducted outdoors
- The event is being conducted after sunset
- There is no electricity available
- You have access to a large fire pit
- A trained Color Guard / Honor Guard is not available
- The event is intended to be informal, yet dignified

### **Before the ceremony ...**

- Invite your guests to bring worn or tattered American flags, POW/MIA flags and State flags
- Invite Active-Duty Servicemembers to appear in uniform
- Invite members of Service Organizations to appear in uniform
- Invite Veterans to wear baseball-style caps that display either the name or the official Seal of the Branch of the Military they served in
- Ask guests to bring lawn-chairs or blankets

### **Assemble the following items ...**

- An American flag of at least 3' x 5' affixed to a sturdy stand or a weighted, portable flag pole
- Two large picnic tables or something similar
- A small table to be used as a podium
- At least 3 large flashlights that can stand upright to illuminate the flag
- At least 2 all-purpose, fully-charged fire extinguishers
- A garden hose and spray-nozzle if water is available at the site
- A small shovel in case a piece of flag becomes airborne and lands outside the fire pit
- A portable CD player with quality speakers
- Copy music on Page 9 to CDs, preferably one song per disc
- A portable microphone
- A small amount of kerosene and 2 suitable spray dispensers
- Arrange for a suitable place to bury the ashes and unburned eyelets the next morning

### **Secure the following volunteers ...**

- A Master of Ceremonies, preferably a Veteran wearing a Military baseball-style cap
- A Color Guard comprised of four adults, preferably Veterans wearing Military baseball-style caps
- A Chaplain to deliver the Invocation
- At least one person responsible for fire-control

### **Prepare the fire pit ...**

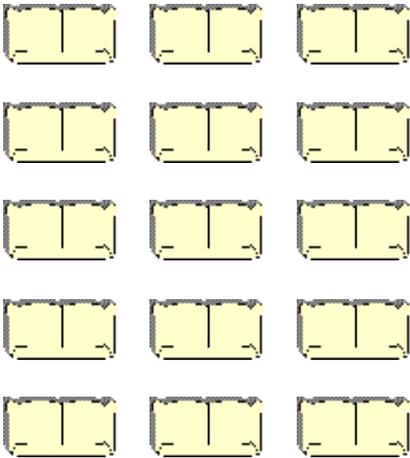
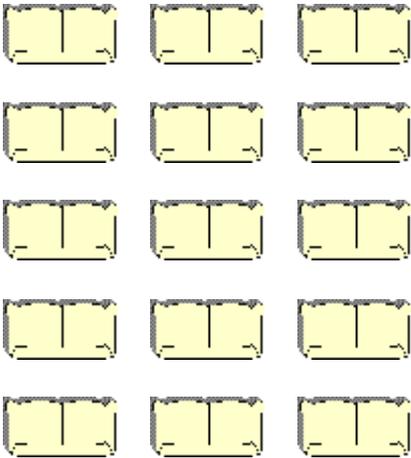
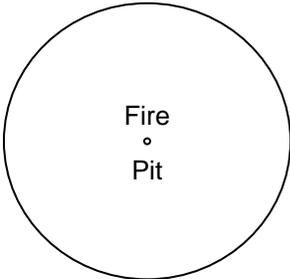
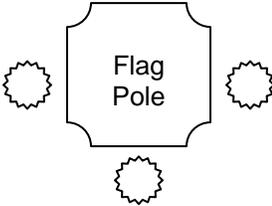
- Ideally, the fire pit will be a large oval completely surrounded by a wall of stones at least 2-feet high
- There should be no dead or green grass, or any other combustible material, within 3-feet of the outside of the pit
- Ashes and any unburned material from previous fires should be removed from the pit
- Insert and level several inches of clean fill dirt into the pit to make it easier to remove ashes from the flags and all unburned material (brass eyelets, melted clumps of nylon, etc.) from the pit the next morning for proper burial in another location

### **Immediately prior to the ceremony ...**

- Light the fire in the pit and be certain it is constantly supervised
- Have the Color Guard volunteers circulate among the guests to find out if anyone has a POW/MIA flag or a State flag to be retired
- If there are flags from more than one State, write down the names of the States so the flags may be retired in the correct order (according to the State's admittance into the Union ... see Page 8)
- If any of your disabled guests have flags for retirement, ask if they would like someone else to present the flag so they don't have to roll a wheelchair across soft ground during the ceremony

# Suggested arrangement ...

 = Flashlights pointing up towards flag



## The Flag Retirement and Disposal Ceremony ...

*The United States Flag should already be raised and secured on the flag pole. The Master of Ceremonies (MC) starts the CD player and plays **You're A Grand Old Flag** to announce the beginning of the ceremony.*

*The MC takes his position behind the podium, facing the audience. The four members of the Color Guard stand at Parade Rest (At Ease, with their hands clasped behind their backs), in between the large tables and the first row of chairs, facing the audience, two members on either side of the center aisle.*

**MC:** Ladies and Gentlemen, please take your seats. *(Pause)*

Tonight we honor the symbol of our American freedom, the American Flag, as we retire her from duty.

As long as Americans cherish liberty more than life itself, the Stars and Stripes shall continue to be the enduring banner of the United States of America. Look at her with renewed allegiance, honor her, respect her, and defend her.

Please rise and remove your hats for the Invocation. Remain standing for the Pledge of Allegiance and the playing of our National Anthem.

*The Chaplain moves to the podium.*

**Chaplain:** Lord, we thank You for our Country, its Flag, and the liberty for which it stands. We humbly ask You to watch over our Servicemembers now serving under our Flag. We commit these Flags, worn-out in worthy service, to a clean and purging flame. As they yield their substance to the fire, may Thy holy light spread over us, bring warmth to our Prisoners-Of-War, provide a beacon for our Missing-In-Action to return home, and bring renewed devotion to God and Country. Amen.

*The MC returns to the podium.*

**MC:** Please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Color Guard! At-ten-TION! A-bout FACE!

Servicemembers and Veterans wearing appropriate covers, At-ten-TION!

*The members of the Color Guard pivot to face the raised Flag. The MC and any other members in the "stage area" also pivot to face the raised Flag. All place their right hand over their hearts and say the Pledge aloud with the MC.*

**MC:** 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.

*Pause to allow everyone to drop their right hand.*

**MC:** Color Guard! Servicemembers! Veterans! Pre-sent ARMS!

The Color Guard, Servicemembers and Veterans wearing appropriate covers raise their right hand to salute the Flag.

*The MC plays **The Star Spangled Banner**. At its conclusion ...*

**MC:** Color Guard! Servicemembers! Veterans! Or-der ARMS!

Color Guard! A-bout FACE! Pa-rade REST!

*The members of the Color Guard pivot to face the audience once again at Parade Rest (At Ease, with their hands clasped behind their backs). The MC and any other members in the "stage area" also pivot to face the audience again.*

**MC:** Please be seated. *(Pause)*

The United States Code stipulates, "When a U.S. flag is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, it should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

We gather these Flags of our Country and of our States, which have been determined to be no longer serviceable. They have reached their present state in a proper service of respect, tribute, and in the memory of all who have served America. What we are about to do is evidence of our utmost respect and undying honor for the Flag.

All those who have flags to be retired may bring them forward at this time, beginning with the first row. As the people from each row return to their seats, the next row should come forward.

*The MC begins playing **The National Emblem March** and replays it as many times as necessary until all flags have been brought forward.*

*One member of the Color Guard stands in front of each of the two tables to receive flags from people as they approach. American Flags are placed in one section of each table, POW/MIA Flags in another section, and State Flags in another. Nylon flags and paper flags should be rotated with cloth flags to facilitate burning.*

*The other two members of the Color Guard stand behind each table and spray each **cloth flag** with kerosene as it is laid on the table (because most cloth flags have been treated with a fire-retardant).*

*When all flags have been brought forward and the MC has finished playing **The National Emblem March** ...*

**MC:** The Color Guard will now begin retiring the flags we honor here tonight. American Flags will be disposed of first, followed by POW/MIA Flags, State Flags in the order they were admitted into the Union, and, finally, Service Flags of the U.S. Army, the U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Air Force and the U.S. Coast Guard.

*The Color Guard collects the flags in the order of preference, takes them to the fire pit and holds them over the fire until they ignite (or gently places them into the fire).*

**MC:** The Color Guard will maintain a vigil over the fire until no traces of the flags remain. Tomorrow morning, the ashes and the top layer of soil will be collected and properly buried.

Please rise as **The Stars and Stripes Forever** plays to recognize that the Flags we retire here tonight have been replaced by new Flags and the new Flags will someday be replaced themselves in a cycle that will never end as long as Americans cherish liberty more than life itself.

*When **The Stars and Stripes Forever** finishes, the Honor Guard continues placing flags into the fire as the ceremony concludes ...*

**MC:** Ladies and Gentlemen, that concludes tonight's ceremony. Thank You and May God Bless America.

*The MC plays **Patriotic Medley** on a continuous loop until the audience disperses.*

## Order of Precedence for Flags ...

United States Flags

POW/MIA Flags

State Flags (in order of admission into the Union)

Service Flags

- U.S. Army
- U.S. Marine Corps
- U.S. Navy
- U.S. Air Force
- U.S. Coast Guard

## State Flag Precedence ...

In order of admission into the Union

- |                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1 - Delaware        | 26 - Michigan      |
| 2 - Pennsylvania    | 27 - Florida       |
| 3 - New Jersey      | 28 - Texas         |
| 4 - Georgia         | 29 - Iowa          |
| 5 - Connecticut     | 30 - Wisconsin     |
| 6 - Massachusetts   | 31 - California    |
| 7 - Maryland        | 32 - Minnesota     |
| 8 - South Carolina  | 33 - Oregon        |
| 9 - New Hampshire   | 34 - Kansas        |
| 10 - Virginia       | 35 - West Virginia |
| 11 - New York       | 36 - Nevada        |
| 12 - North Carolina | 37 - Nebraska      |
| 13 - Rhode Island   | 38 - Colorado      |
| 14 - Vermont        | 39 - North Dakota  |
| 15 - Kentucky       | 40 - South Dakota  |
| 16 - Tennessee      | 41 - Montana       |
| 17 - Ohio           | 42 - Washington    |
| 18 - Louisiana      | 43 - Idaho         |
| 19 - Indiana        | 44 - Wyoming       |
| 20 - Mississippi    | 45 - Utah          |
| 21 - Illinois       | 46 - Oklahoma      |
| 22 - Alabama        | 47 - New Mexico    |
| 23 - Maine          | 48 - Arizona       |
| 24 - Missouri       | 49 - Alaska        |
| 25 - Arkansas       | 50 - Hawaii        |

## Links to download the required music ...

*Music is listed in the sequence it will be played*

### ***You're A Grand Old Flag***

<http://militarysalute.proboards45.com/index.cgi?board=music&action=display&thread=1148062989>

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

<http://militarysalute.proboards45.com/index.cgi?board=music&action=display&thread=1140711763>

### ***The National Emblem March***

<http://militarysalute.proboards45.com/index.cgi?board=music&action=display&thread=1131768816>

### ***The Stars and Stripes Forever***

<http://militarysalute.proboards45.com/index.cgi?board=music&action=display&thread=1140711502>

### ***Patriotic Medley***

- **This Is My Country**
- **God Bless America**
- **This Land Is Your Land**
- **America, The Beautiful**

<http://militarysalute.proboards45.com/index.cgi?board=music&action=display&thread=1130551910>

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This protocol conforms to the United States Code and to U.S. Department of Defense directives as they existed when these guidelines were published. All five Branches of the United States Military have incorporated baseball-style caps into their inventory of uniforms, therefore, it is permissible for Veterans to salute while wearing them providing they display the name of the Branch and/or the official Seal of the respective Branch.

This manual may be distributed at will, provided it is displayed intact without editing and that it is done so free of charge.