Flag Ceremonies at Camp

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Abstract
Included in this bulletin are basic American Flag education and creative ideas to make the flag ceremony meaningful at camp.

American Flag Basics
- 13 equal horizontal stripes of red alternating with white
- 1 blue rectangle in the upper hoist-side corner bearing 50 small, white, five-pointed stars arranged in 9 offset horizontal rows of 6 stars alternating with rows of 5 stars
- 50 stars represent 50 states
- 13 stripes represent 13 original colonies

What do the colors represent?
The Continental Congress left no record to show why it chose the colors; however, in 1782 the Congress of the Confederation chose these same colors for the Great Seal of the US and listed their meaning as follows:
- WHITE: purity and innocence
- RED: valor and hardiness
- BLUE: vigilance, perseverance, justice

My flag touched the ground. Do I need to destroy it?
No. If the flag has been dirtied, clean it by hand with a mild soap solution and dry it well before returning to use.

How to Display the Flag
1. HALF STAFF: First hoist the flag to the peak for an instant and then lower to the half-staff position. The flag should be again raised to the peak before it is lowered for the day.

2. AMERICAN FLAG and 4-H FLAG: When flying the 4-H flag and the American flag on the same staff, the latter should always be at the peak.

When the flags are flown from adjacent staffs, the American flag should be hoisted first and lowered last.

3. FLAG FROM AN ANGLE: When the American flag is displayed from a staff projecting horizontally or at an angle from the window sill, balcony, or front of a building, the union of the flag should be placed at the peak of the staff unless the flag is at half-staff.

Elements of Flag Ceremonies
- Formation: The group forms a circle/horseshoe around the flag pole. Typically the group is expected to remain silent during the ceremony unless singing/reciting as instructed.
- Color Guard: Two or more who carry/escort the flag to and from the flag pole in honor and raise/lower the flag. Color guard salutes the flag, but does not speak or sing during the ceremony.
- Caller: This position stands to the side, but calls the commands for the guard in a clear, loud voice.

When is a flag ceremony performed?
To start the day—before or after breakfast for resident camp or after everyone arrives but before activities start for day camp lasting no longer than 10 minutes.

To end the day—around dinner time or before dark for resident camp or just prior to dismissal for day camp lasting no longer than 10 minutes.
Color Guard Example:
The Caller: Stands to the side and directs the flag ceremony.

“Campers please come to attention.” (Asking campers to become silent)

“Color guard advance.” (Instructing the color guard to walk forward carrying the flag.)

“Color guard post the colors.” (Instructing the color guard to attach the flag to the flag pole or mount the flag on a pole in stand.)

“Campers, the flag of your country.” (Instructing everyone to salute the flag.)

“Campers please join me in…” (Inviting the participants to join in pledge, song, etc. Color guard stands at attention, but does not sing or recite.)

“Color Guard retreat (or dismissed).” (Instructing the color guard to return to their starting point)

“Campers dismissed” (Ends the flag ceremony.)

Flag Burning Ceremony
This ceremony can be used when a flag is no longer a fitting emblem for our country. The setting for this ceremony is a camp fire, but you can alter any part to suit your needs. The people not involved in the ceremony are seated around the camp fire. They will need to be seated at least 10-15 feet away from the fire to give the flag bearers room to work. Six to eight flag bearers holding the flag straight out either waist or shoulder high. Flag bearers start from outside the fire circle as Reader I begins:

Reader I: I am Old Glory. For more than 9 score years I have been the banner of hope and freedom for generations 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 fifty sovereign states.

Reader II: Planted firmly on the high pinnacle of American Faith, my gently fluttering folds have been 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 has been granted to every American as the heritage of free men.

Reader III: So long as men love liberty more than life itself, so long as they treasure the priceless privileges of truth, justice, and charity for all and these remain deeply rooted in human hearts, I shall continue to be the enduring banner of the USA.

(As Reader III ends, the flag should have come around the fire circle to a stop. Lower the bottom edge of the flag so that everyone can take one last look.)

Prepare readings for each of the other Readers (IV thru IX) to include the Pledge of Allegiance and a patriotic song. As the song begins, the flag bearers place the stripes and field of blue on the fire. When the song is finished Reader IX begins.

The Flag Bearers then walk out of the fire circle in formation.

REFERENCE: Mountaineer Camping Institute, 2007, Flag Ceremony Workshop instructed by Maile Armstrong, Virginias ACA Standards Chair.