

## **Respecting the Red, White, & Blue**

© Tara Crooks

It is a time for patriotism. As a military spouse, I am thrilled to see pride in our country. Everywhere you turn you see bumper stickers, yellow ribbons, and flags. Our national symbol, an American flag, we fly them, but do we know how to properly take care of our flags? Do we know how and when to display them?

Believe it or not there are flag laws. The laws relating to the flag of the United States of America are found in detail in the United States Code. Title 4, Chapter 1 pertains to the flag; Title 18, Chapter 33, Section 700 regards criminal penalties for flag desecration; Title 36, Chapter 3 pertains to patriotic customs and observances. These laws were supplemented by Executive Orders and Presidential Proclamations. These orders govern the proper use, display, care, and many other issues regarding the flag.

There are no penalties for improper use or display of the flag. The Flag Code is intended as a guide to be followed on a purely voluntary basis to insure proper respect for the flag. However, especially in times of showing patriotism one might want to know the code in order to not violate it in their display of their pride.

There is an extensive list of flag etiquette; however most does not apply to the average citizen's every day use of the flag. Below you'll find some reminders and tips to use for your flag presentation and recognition.

The Pledge of Allegiance 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." should be rendered by standing 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.

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

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

The flag should be displayed daily on or near the main administration building of every public institution.

The flag should be displayed in or near every polling place on election days.

The flag should be displayed during school days in or near every schoolhouse.

The flag should be displayed on all days, especially on

- New Year's Day
- Inauguration Day
- Martin Luther King Jr's Birthday
- Lincoln's Birthday
- Washington's Birthday

- Easter Sunday
- Mother's Day
- Father's Day
- Armed Forces Day
- Memorial Day
- Flag Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Constitution Day
- Columbus Day
- Navy Day
- Veterans Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Christmas Day
- State Holidays

When displaying your flag from your car, the staff shall be fixed firmly to the chassis or clamped to the right fender.

When a flag is hung in a window, place the blue union in the upper left, as viewed from the street.

No disrespect should be shown to the flag of the United States of America; the flag should not be dipped to any person or thing. Regimental colors, State flags, and organization or institutional flags are to be dipped as a mark of honor.

Unfortunately, it is very common to find flag respect violations. Below are a few gentle reminders.

The flag should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, the floor, water, or merchandise.

The flag should never be used as wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery. It should never be festooned, drawn back, nor up, in folds, but always allowed to fall free. Bunting of blue, white, and red, always arranged with the blue above, the white in the middle, and the red below, should be used for covering a speaker's desk, draping the front of the platform, and for decoration in general.

The flag should never have placed upon it, nor on any part of it, nor attached to it any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture, or drawing of any nature.

Most flags sold nowadays are all-weather flags (refer to the packaging). These are permitted to fly during inclement weather, according to the Flag Code.

Care of your flag is also important. If the flag has been dirtied, you should clean it by hand with a mild soap solution and dry it well before returning it to use. If a flag is torn, it can be repaired, preferably by a professional or someone skilled in mending. If it is faded or tattered beyond repair, or dirty beyond cleaning, then it is time to replace the flag. The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.

To see the complete flag code visit: <http://uscode.house.gov/download/download.shtml>