

National Society Sons of the American Revolution



Unserviceable Flag Retirement Ceremony

Purpose:

To present a dignified ceremony for the proper retirement of faded, torn or otherwise unserviceable United States flags and other flags appropriate for ceremonial retirement. This ceremony may be conducted by an SAR Chapter or State Society and may be performed jointly with other organizations, such as, the DAR, the C.A.R., the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and the local fire department. Such events support the SAR's Flag Respect program.

The use of a crematory is suggested when there are a large number of flags for disposal. The only equipment needed is a crematory facility willing to conduct the service and a crematory box to hold the flags.

Formation:

The Chapter President will assemble the members and guests at a convenient location near the crematory. The members and guests who carry a flag for retirement will form a line behind the Sergeant-at-Arms. A Color Guardsman will be positioned on each side of the Sergeant-at-Arms. In case there are a large number of flags being retired, the extra flags not being carried by members and guests, may be placed in the cremation box beforehand. The Chapter President and the Chaplain will lead the line of posted flags and stop approximately 7-10 yards from the cremation box. At a signal from the President, the following will take place: (1) The President and Chaplain will move near the head of the cremation box, stand side by side, and face the Sergeant-at-Arms. The President will stand nearest to the cremation box; (2) a third Color Guardsman will move to the head of the cremation box and stand behind the President and Chaplain; (3) Two Boy Scouts will move to either side of the cremation box and assist in placing the flags in the box.

Ceremony:

President: *Compatriots and guests, Let us begin this solemn ceremony with an invocation from our Chaplain.*

Chaplain: *(Prayer by Chaplain) “. Amen.”*

Sergeant-at-Arms: *“Compatriot President, we wish to present a number of unserviceable United States flags for inspection and retirement.”*

President: *“Compatriot Sergeant-at-Arms, let the compatriots and guests advance and present their flags for inspection and retirement.”*

(The line advances until they are in front of the President. The two Color Guardsmen advance to stand on either side of the President and Chaplain.)

Sergeant-at-Arms: *“Compatriot President, we have the honor to present for final inspection and proper retirement these flags of our country. They have become faded and worn and are therefore unserviceable. It is recommended that they be fittingly destroyed.”*

(Sergeant-at-Arms will move to the foot of the cremation box. The people bring their flags to the President, who briefly inspects them and hands them back to the flag bearer, who then takes the flag to the cremation box and hands it to a Boy Scout. The scout then places the flag in the box.)

(After all flags has been inspected and placed in the cremation box, the ceremony continues.)

President: *“Compatriots, we have presented here flags of the United States of America, which have been inspected and condemned as unserviceable. They have reached their present state in proper service to our country.*

“A flag may be a flimsy bit of printed gauze, or a beautiful banner of finest silk. Its intrinsic value may be trifling or great, but its real value is beyond price, for it is a precious symbol of all that we and our compatriots have worked for and lived for, and died for – a free nation of free men and women, true to the faith of the past, devoted to the ideals and practice of justice, freedom, and democracy. Let these faded flags of our country be retired and destroyed with respectful and honorable rites and their place be taken by bright new flags of the same size and kind, and let no grave of our soldiers, sailors, or airmen be unhonored and unmarked.”

President: *“The Chaplain will offer a prayer.”*

Chaplain: *(Prayer) “. Amen.”*

(The Color Guardsmen will cover the cremation box and slowly move it to the crematory as the bugler plays “To the Colors.” When the cremation box is in the crematory, the Color Guardsmen will stand at attention.)

President: “*Hand Salute.*”

The Color Guard salutes. The Militia fires a musket salute.

The bugler sounds “Taps.”

President: (At the conclusion of “Taps”) “*Two*” (*The salute is completed*)

President: (Makes appropriate closing remarks).....”*Dismissed.*”

The service is concluded.

Contributed by: Paul Prescott