

The Flag of the United States of America Committee

Flag Facts

1777

The flag's original design remained the same from 1777 to 1795.

On June 14, 1777, the Second Continental Congress, meeting in Philadelphia, passed the Flag Act of 1777, a resolution creating an official flag for a new nation still struggling to gain its independence from Britain. It stated, in part, that America's flag "...be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation." And the design pretty much stayed that way for nearly two decades. The first significant change came in January 1794, when two stars and two stripes were added to reflect the recent admissions of Kentucky and Vermont to the Union. It was this 15-star, 15-stripe flag that inspired Francis Scott Key to write the poem that later became known as the Star-Spangled Banner, after seeing it fly over Ft. McHenry during the War of 1812. In 1818, another design went into effect, permanently setting the number of stripes at 13 (in honor of the original colonies) and allowing for new stars to be added ceremonially each July 4 should a new state be admitted.

1777

June 14, 1777 — Continental Congress adopts the following

Resolved: that the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation.

Stars represent Delaware (December 7, 1787), Pennsylvania (December 12, 1787), New Jersey (December 18, 1787), Georgia (January 2, 1788), Connecticut (January 9, 1788), Massachusetts (February 6, 1788), Maryland (April 28, 1788), South Carolina (May 23, 1788), New Hampshire (June 21, 1788), Virginia (June 25, 1788), New York (July 26, 1788), North Carolina (November 21, 1789), and Rhode Island (May 29, 1790)

1784

The "Flower Flag"

In 1784 the people of China nicknamed our flag the "Flower Flag." Not having seen the American flag until Captain John Greene sailed his ship *The Empress of China* to the Canton River on September 13th, a Chinese viewer remarked it looked like a beautiful flower.

1787

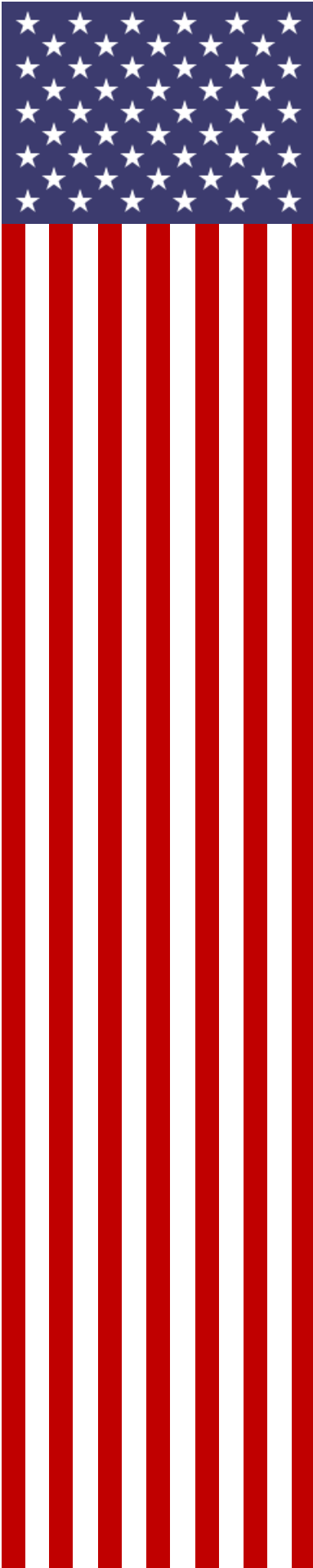
Around the world in 1,045 days

The American flag made its first trip around the world on the ship *Columbia*. The ship left the port of Boston on September 30, 1787 and returned on August 10, 1790.

1794

15-Striped Flag

The 15-star, 15-stripe flag was authorized by the Flag Act of January 13, 1794, was signed by President George Washington. The additional stars and striped reflected the admission of Vermont and Kentucky to the Union. The regulation went into effect on May 1, 1795. This flag was the only U.S. Flag to have more than 13 stripes. It was immortalized by Francis Scott Key during the bombardment of Fort McHenry, Sept 13, 1814. The image above is representative of the actual flag that flew over Fort McHenry on that day, and which is now preserved in the Smithsonian Museum.



1812

Flying the Flag at School

In May of 1812 a log schoolhouse at Catamount Hill near Colrain, Massachusetts gained the distinction of first flying the American flag over a schoolhouse. The flag was constructed by sisters Rhoda and Lois Shippee. A stone marker memorializes the event. A commissioned painting by Frank Schoonover's in 1941 depicts the flag raising.

1824

Only one "Old Glory"

The name "Old Glory" was loudly proclaimed in 1824 by Captain William Driver as he hoisted the flag given to him as a birthday present (March 17). The flag would accompany Driver on his numerous voyages around the world. When he gave up seafaring and moved inland to Nashville, Tennessee in 1837, Driver continued to display the flag proudly by hanging it from a locust tree. He even updated the flag in 1861 to reflect thirty-four stars and added an anchor in the corner to indicate his sea service. When Tennessee seceded from the Union, Driver had the foresight to hide the flag and had his daughter conceal it inside a quilt, which was overlooked in numerous raids on his house. Old Glory remained in the quilt until February 25, 1862 when Ulysses S. Grant captured Fort Donelson and occupied Nashville. On that day Driver uncovered the flag, marched through the streets to the capitol building, climbed to its dome, and hoisted the flag for all to see.

1861

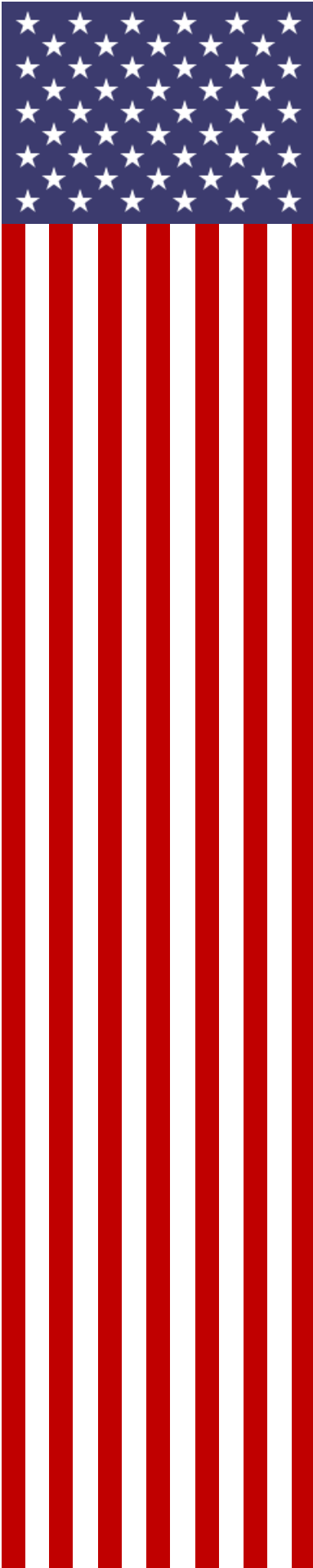
The only casualties at Fort Sumter were flag-related.

More than 620,000 Americans lost their life during the Civil War, but only two of those fatalities occurred during the first battle of the war. When Confederate forces began a bombardment of Fort Sumter, in Charleston Harbor on April 12, 1861, Union commander Major Robert Anderson held out for more than 34 hours before finally surrendering the fort. One of Anderson's conditions for surrendering was that his men be allowed to observe a 100-gun salute as the American flag was lowered from the fort. During the ceremony, a nearby pile of rifle cartridges exploded, killing two soldiers (the first fatalities of the war) and injuring four others. Anderson carried the flag, badly damaged during the bombardment, to the north where it was frequently displayed to boost morale. Four years to the day after Anderson's surrender, he once again raised the flag over Sumter after the Union had recaptured the fort. Just a few hours later, Abraham Lincoln would be fatally shot by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theatre.

1885

Only one state observes Flag Day as a legal state holiday

It took more than a century after the creation of America's flag for anyone to suggest a holiday to honor it. In 1885, a Wisconsin grade schoolteacher named Bernard Cigrand held what's believed to be the first recognized Flag Day, which began a lifelong quest to establish a formal holiday. Woodrow Wilson issued a presidential proclamation calling for a June 14 commemoration in 1916, but it wasn't until 1949, 16 years after the death of the Cigrand, the "father of Flag Day," that Congress passed legislation as a national holiday. It is not, however, a federal holiday. In fact, it's only an official holiday in any capacity in one state. Perhaps fittingly, it's Pennsylvania, where the flag was officially created, and legend holds (though it's wholly unsubstantiated) that local seamstress Betsy Ross sewed the original flag.



1889

White House Flag

President Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893), husband of DAR's first President General Caroline Scott Harrison, ordered the American flag to be flown above the White House and other government buildings and urged schools to do the same.

1897

Adoption of State Statutes protecting the flag

By the late 1800's an organized flag protection movement was born in reaction to perceived commercial and political misuse of the flag. After supporters failed to obtain federal legislation, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and South Dakota became the first States to adopt flag desecration statutes. By 1932, all of the States had adopted flag desecration laws. However, these laws are continually challenged and have often been the subject of reviews by the Supreme Court.

1907

Respecting the Flag

If early politicians had their way, you would see a lot less of the American flag.

While the battle over perceived desecration of the flag remains a hot button issue today, some of the first anti-desecration measures had little to do with flag burning or other destructive measures. In fact, 19th century lawmakers were more concerned with the already rampant use of the flag as a promotional tool by advertisers, which they considered treating the banner with "contempt." Many of the first statutes passed by state and local governments aimed to restrict use of the flag's image on commercial products. In 1907, the Supreme Court upheld these laws in the case of *Halter v. Nebraska*, and many of them remain on the books today.

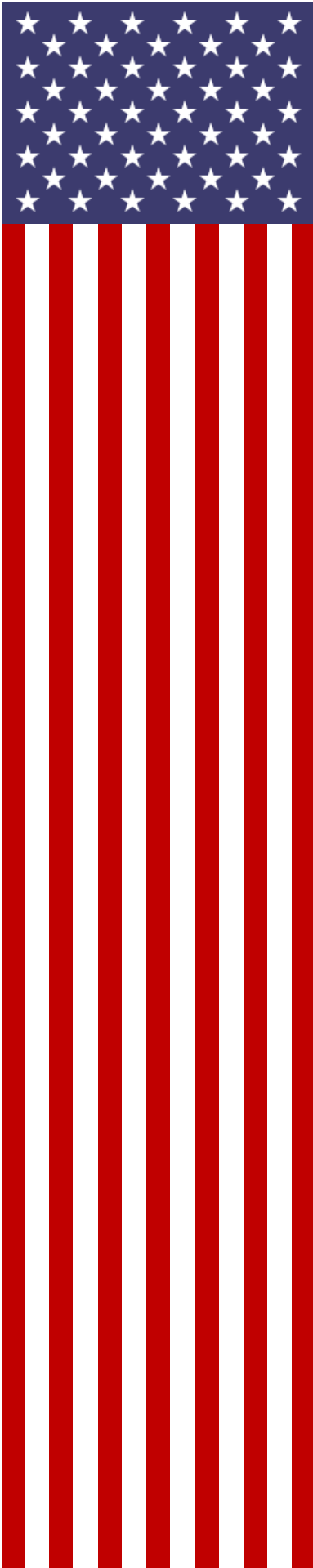
1912-1959 the 48-Star American Flag

- Two stars were added to the flag for the admission of New Mexico and Arizona
- President Taft passed an Executive Order in 1912 establishing proportions for the flag and arranging the stars in six horizontal rows of eight, with each star pointing upward
- This flag was in service for 47 years, lasting through two World Wars and making it the longest serving flag until July 4, 2007, when it will be succeeded by the 50-star American flag
- William H. Taft, Woodrow Wilson, Warren Harding, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower served under this flag

1924

Circumnavigate the earth by air

The first time the American flag circled the world by air was when six United States Air Force crewmen flew around the world. On April 6, 1924, four Douglas World Cruisers and eight crewmen set out from Seattle, WA, to attempt the first around-the-world airplane flight. Some 175 days later, on September 28, three of the bi-planes and the six men aboard became the first to circumnavigate the earth by air.



1927

Flag Day Presidential Proclamation

Flag Day commemorates the date the first Continental Congress adopted the American flag in its First Flag Resolution of June 14, 1777. While flag celebrations took place for many years, Woodrow Wilson was the first president to issue a proclamation that June 14th be called National Flag Day. Calvin Coolidge issued a second proclamation in 1927. Finally, in 1949 Congress approved and President Harry Truman signed the bill officially recognizing Flag Day.

1942

Federal Flag Code

On June 22, 1942, President Roosevelt approves the Federal Flag Code, providing for uniform guidelines for the display and respect shown to the flag. The Flag Code does not prescribe any penalties for non-compliance nor does it include any enforcement provisions, rather it functions simply as a guide for voluntary civilian compliance.

1945

Poetic justice

The flag that flew over Pearl Harbor naval base in Hawaii on Sunday, December 7, 1941, was flown over the White House on August 14, 1945, "V-J Day" when the Japanese accepted surrender terms.

1949

The current version of the flag was designed by a student

In 1949, 17-year-old Robert G. Heft created an updated flag for a class project, and the poor kid only got a B-. Luckily, that didn't dissuade him. He submitted his idea to President Eisenhower when Alaska and Hawaii gained statehood. Out of over 1500 submissions, his design was chosen.

1954

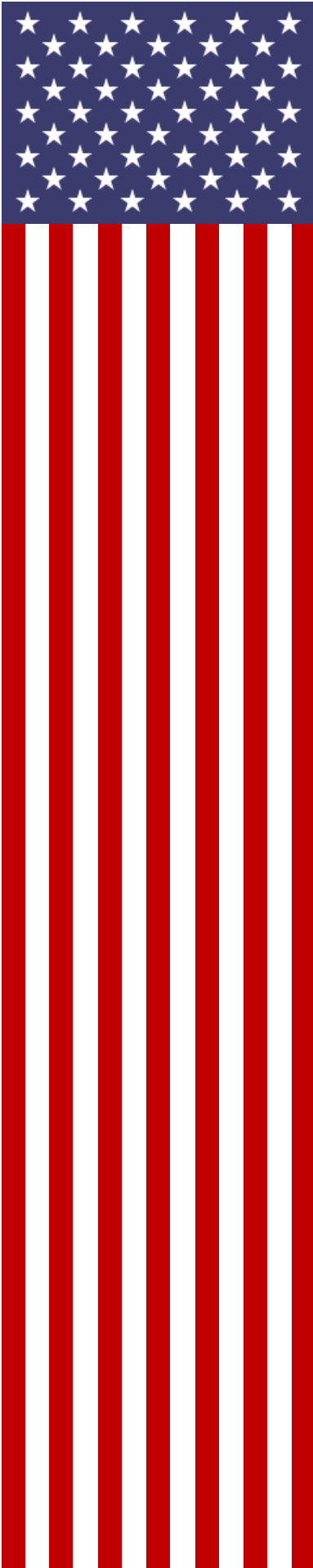
Flying at half-staff

In the early days of our country, no regulations existed for flying the flag at half-staff and, as a result, there were many conflicting policies. But on March 1, 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower issued a proclamation on the proper times. The flag should fly at half-staff for 30 days after the death of the president or a former president. It is to fly 10 days at half-staff after the death of the vice president, the chief justice, or a retired chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, or the speaker of the House of Representatives. The flag is to be displayed at half-staff from the day of death until interment for other dignitaries such as a past vice-presidents, an associate justice of the Supreme Court, a member of the Cabinet, and members of Congress. The president may order the flag to be flown at half-staff to mark the death of other officials, former officials, or foreign dignitaries.

1959

There have been 27 official versions of the American Flag

On the American flag, the stripes represent the 13 original colonies, while the stars represent each state. Since there weren't always 50 states, there weren't always 50 stars. Each flag was similar, but with a different number of stars. If you visit the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, you can see the remnants of the 15-star, 15-stripe flag that inspired the national anthem.



1963

'Gilligan's Island' directors respected the flag. During the opening sequence of the first season of the show, the American flag is filmed at half-staff. This was done to honor President Kennedy, who was assassinated the day the pilot episode was filmed.

1968

Adoption of Federal Flag Desecration Law (18 U.S.C. 700 et seq.)

Congress approves the first federal flag desecration law in the wake of a highly publicized Central Park flag burning incident in protest of the Vietnam War. The federal law made it illegal to "knowingly" cast "contempt" upon "any flag of the United States by publicly mutilating, defacing, defiling, burning or trampling upon it." The law defined flag in an expansive manner similar to most States.

1968

Burning a flag isn't technically illegal

Historically, unlike flying a flag upside down, burning the flag was done as an act of protest. The Flag Protection Act of 1968 made this illegal, but the act was revoked 20 years later. The Supreme Court ruled that the government couldn't limit citizens' First Amendment rights, making it legal to do whatever you want to a flag with no legal consequences.

1969

There are 6 American flags on the moon

Live television coverage allowed the world to watch Apollo 11 Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin raise the American flag on the surface of the moon 20 July 1969. The 3 x 5 nylon flag was purchased at Sears for \$5.50. The pole was driven only 6 to 9 inches into the moon's surface. Buzz Aldrin reported that because of the proximity to the lunar module, he believed the flag was blown over by the engine's exhaust during liftoff. The subsequent five manned Apollo missions also planted American flags, and those five flags are believed to still be standing as evidenced by photos taken in 2012 by NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter camera. However, the flags appear to have faded to white.

2001

After 9/11 we held our flag a little closer

National tragedies are known for bringing our country together. According to Karen Burke of Walmart's Corporate Communications, their stores sold 115,000 flags on September 11, 2001, compared to only 6,400 flags in 2000. In the following year, they sold a whopping 7.8 million US flags- around triple the sales of the previous year

2005

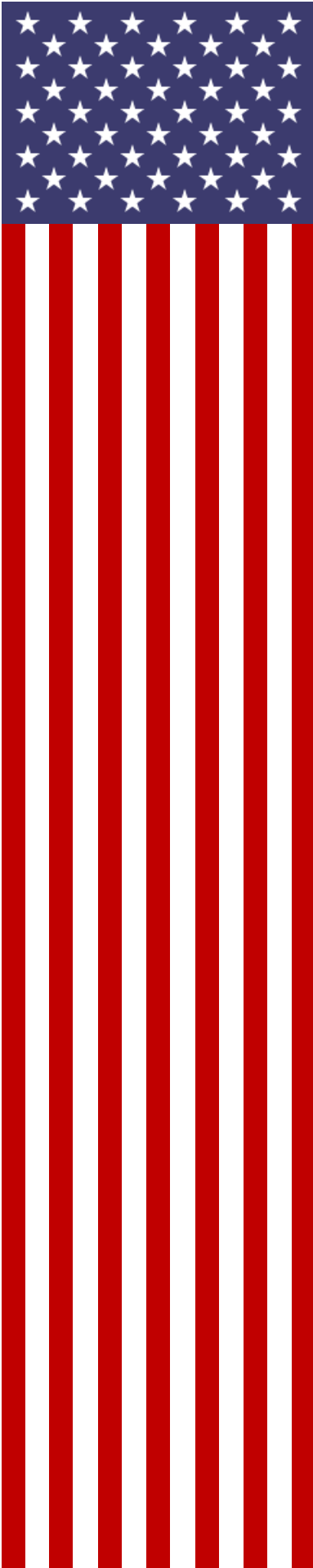
Home Sweet Home

The Freedom to Display the American Flag Act of 2005 prohibits real estate management organizations from restricting homeowners from displaying the Flag of the United States on their own property.

2005

A Constitutional Amendment to protect the flag

On January 25, 2005 a Constitutional amendment to protect the flag was introduced. It reads, "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States." Six months later it was approved by the House (286-130). However, in 2006 the Senate was one vote short of passing the Constitutional amendment.



2007

Honoring the Fallen

The Army Specialist Greg L. Chambers Federal Flag Code Amendment Act of 2007 added a provision to allow governors, or the mayor of the District of Columbia, to proclaim that the flag be flown at half-staff upon the death of a member of the Armed Forces from any State, territory, or possession who died while serving on active duty. The provision directs federal facilities in the area covered by the governor or mayor of the District of Columbia to fly the flag at half-staff consistent with such proclamations.

2020

Indestructible flags exist

Historically, enemies of the United States have burned or defaced our flag to make a statement. (That's why messing with the flag is a really, really bad idea, even if it's not illegal!) To protect defaced flags from being used as a propaganda tool by enemies, a Green Beret veteran has designed an all but indestructible flag. Made out of Kevlar and Nomex, the new materials ensure the flag can't be burned or torn while still allowing it to fly naturally. <https://firebrandflags.com/>

Kyle Daniels is a former U.S. Army Green Beret who served on multiple combat deployments with 10th Special Forces Group. Upon returning home, he was struck by the disrespect shown to the American flag and vowed to protect it, just as his brothers and sisters in arms had done overseas. Kyle started Firebrand based off of the word's definition, "a person who is passionate about a particular cause, typically inciting change and taking radical action." Made out of Kevlar and Nomex, the new materials ensure that the flag cannot be burned or torn while still allowing it to fly naturally. Today, Firebrand Flags continues to change the narrative as the first and only U.S.-based company to make an official, fire-retardant U.S. Flag.

The colors of the flag have important meanings

Red, white and blue were chosen to represent, respectively, valor, purity, and liberty. The colors also have specific names; "Old Glory Blue," "Old Glory Red," and white. Just plain white. But the Textile Color Card Association of the United States (TCCA) creates the palate of colors used for both private and public institutions, and the U.S. Army that issues a reference guide of acceptable shades to be used in local, state, and national flags. So, if you're trying to produce a truly authentic American flag, you'll need to use the exact shades of white, "Old Glory Red" and "Old Glory Blue," specified in the guide. However, mass-market flag manufacturers have been known to fudge a bit and use the more-easily processed Pantone Matching Shades of Dark Red (193 C) and Navy Blue (281 C).

Flying the flag at half-staff

The United States flag flies at half-staff (or half-mast) when the nation or a state is in mourning. The flag should be briskly run up to the top of the staff before being lowered slowly to the half-staff position.

The president, through a presidential proclamation, a state governor, or the mayor of the District of Columbia can order flags to fly at half-staff. Most often, this is done to mark the death of a government official, military member, or first responder; in honor of Memorial Day or other national day of remembrance; or following a national tragedy. On Memorial Day the flag should be flown at half-staff from sunrise until noon only, then raised briskly to the top of the staff until sunset, in honor of the nation's battle heroes.

KSDAR 2022:KH