

The American Legion



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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Flag Day 2020

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Seventy-five years ago an iconic photograph by Joe Rosenthal helped rally a nation. The flag-raising at Mt. Suribachi showed America's fighters at their finest.

Upon witnessing the placement of the Stars & Stripes prominently flying on Iwo Jima, Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal reportedly told Gen. "Howlin Mad" Smith, "Holland, the raising of the flag on Suribachi means a Marine Corps for the next five hundred years."

But the image wasn't just about the heroic Marines. It wasn't about Navy Corpsman John Bradley, who helped raise another flag which was chronicled in an earlier photograph. It was about the symbol that they cherished enough to risk their lives in order to plant atop a hill for all to see. Three of the flag raisers did not survive the battle.

Although many American Flags have been tattered and torn in battle, they are often symbols of hope that even in the most trying of times – America will survive.

Another memorable flag-raising occurred in the rubble of the World Trade Center shortly after the 9/11 attacks. Three New York City firefighters reminded the nation, and the world, that yes – America had taken a blow – but the United States was not defeated and would indeed rise again.

Americans love their flag, which is why President Harry S. Truman, an active and proud member of The American Legion, signed an act of Congress in 1949 which designated June 14th as Flag Day.

Our esteem for the Flag is why The American Legion called together 68 other patriotic, fraternal, civic and military groups for the purpose of drafting a code of flag etiquette in 1923. They were enormously successful. It is why American Legionnaires continue to visit classrooms to teach young people about the importance of respecting this precious symbol of freedom.

One of the speakers at the 1923 National Flag Conference was the legendary labor leader Samuel Gompers. He described how union workers felt about Old Glory. “To us,” he said, “the American Flag means more than even its colors in themselves portray. It means the leadership of the democratic and humane struggle has been carried on throughout all the ages.”

Last summer, former Navy SEAL Dom Raso was feeling exhausted after a three-and-a-half mile run at Virginia Beach. Along the town’s oceanfront, he noticed a Flag at the Navy SEAL monument. It was flying crooked and out of place because of a poor connection on a very windy day.

Three times he tried to shimmy up the flag pole. He was unsuccessful. He tried a fourth time and made it to the top.

Video of Dom fixing the Flag went viral on social media.

“This flag pole climb reminded me about EVERYTHING in life,” the veteran posted. “There has been way too grave a sacrifice for me not to try. Once I do try, I have to give it my ALL for them...” –unquote.

That's what Old Glory is all about. Materially, it's a piece of cloth but symbolically it means so much more. It represents not just our country, but those who defended and, in some cases, died for it.

While the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic have yet to produce an iconic Flag image rivaling the Mt. Suribachi or World Trade Center photos, the Flag itself is a rallying point.

This was the mindset of American Legionnaires from Post 335 in Sylvester, Georgia as they placed 300 Flags along both sides of U.S. Highway 82 in early April.

Quote – “I know it's not a holiday, but we need to put them out just to let people know that there's hope and we can get through this,” Legionnaire Paul Greer said to his post commander.

Included among the Flags which dot a 4,500-foot stretch of the George-Florida Parkway are a couple of signs. “Together We Are Strong, We Will Survive This” is one message. The other, “America United We Stand!” Simple messages made stronger by the Stars & Stripes, and the Emblems of The American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary, the Sons of The American Legion and The American Legion Riders. Like our Flag, The American Legion is often a source of comfort during challenging times.

When a veteran passed away at the Javits New York Medical Station on April 19th, Post 178 in Millerton, New York, ensured that a casket Flag was provided.

Sadly, the requests for this honor were just beginning as COVID-19 would take the lives of many veterans. Within hours of the first passing, Post Commander Al Andrews sent 15 more Flags to the facility.

“If it’s for the veterans, we’re pretty much doing whatever we can to help meet a need,” Commander Andrews said. “The support, although unique in this pandemic response, is exactly what The American Legion is intended for.”-unquote.

As unique as these times are, so is our Flag. Retired Army Major General Patrick Brady earned a Medal of Honor as a dust-off pilot during the Vietnam War. He is also a former chairman of the Citizens Flag Alliance and a dedicated champion of a flag protection amendment to the Constitution.

He recently pointed out the significance of our nation’s symbol.

“Our Flag is unique” General Brady said. “It does not represent a dictator or a party or a geography, but a set of values. It is the shroud for the coffins of our dead servicemembers, veterans and public officials; it is the tissue for the tears of those left behind.” Unquote.

The American Flag does not run. It does not back down. And neither do its defenders.

Last year when Camping World CEO Marcus Lemonis flew a 40-by-80-foot American Flag on a 130-foot pole outside his Gander RV dealership, he was sued by city officials in North Carolina. The Flag was too large, he was told.

Rather than remove the Flag, Mr. Lemonis settled the case by paying \$14,000 in fines and \$2,000 in legal costs.

But the victory was his, as city officials knew that the patriotic businessman would not budge. The city wisely changed its zoning codes to allow the grand old flag to stay.

Though impressive and attractive, it isn't the fabric, the cloth or even the colors that make the Flag of the United States special.

It is the people who defend it and the nation that it represents which makes the American Flag the envy of the world.

And long will she fly!

Thank you for being here. God Bless America and God Bless our Flag.

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