

**The  
American  
Legion**



*For God and country*

## *Suggested Speech*

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# **Flag Day**

## **2007**

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Today our nation recognizes the one national symbol that represents all that we - as a free people - cherish.

More than a piece of cloth, the United States Flag is the embodiment of our constitution that proclaims our absolute commitment to defending the freedoms given to us by our Creator.

It represents the countless sacrifices made by so many of our fellow Americans to ensure our freedom.

Let me share with you a story that illustrates how so many of us feel about Old Glory.

It comes from the grandson of a veteran from the “greatest generation”:

“My grandfather was a glider infantryman in WWII, an advisor in Korea, and lost one of his sons, my uncle Gary Edwards, in Vietnam. I worked in his auto repair station during high school and he flew his flag in front daily.

“One day while I was sweeping the oil dry out of the bays it began to sprinkle at work, it began to rain. He told me to go get the flag and I said "gimme a second." He said, "It's raining, go get the flag NOW."

“Well I popped off my mouth about how he should cool it – it isn't going to melt or some such typical teenage comment.

“My grandfather is the toughest man I've ever met. And when I said whatever it was that I said to him, he turned deep crimson and I thought, "God save me, he's going to kill me for talking back."

“Instead, tears welled up in his eyes and he squeaked out, “You don't understand what this family has paid for the right to fly that flag.” Then he turned his back on me and went out and got the flag.

“I just stood there feeling like the smallest person to ever live. Those words cut me so deep. I wish the entire country could have heard them.”

That testimonial by Mike Dalka, the grandson of an American veteran, accents our purpose of being here today.

Flag Day is a day for all Americans to celebrate and show respect for that precious symbol of freedom.

Take for example the story of Mrs. Marie Fremont. Marie was at the cemetery on Sunday, Mother's Day, to put new flowers at her mother's grave.

While she cleaned the surrounding area, she found several American flags in a heap of trash.

Marie could not believe her eyes. "The flag doesn't deserve the garbage pile," she said.

"When I got up here and discovered all these flags, it just broke my heart because my country means a lot to me," Marie says.

She has a nephew about to serve in the Middle East, and her husband, Lawrence, was in the Navy. He served in the Korean War, and in his later years, he placed new flags in cemeteries as a service of The American Legion.

Marie took her story to the local news media.

"There's many places to go to - you could take them to any American Legion," Marie said.

Once the community learned about the flagrant discarding of our national symbol, The American Legion and other veterans organizations in town stepped forward to educate the cemetery executive director on the proper ritual for disposing our flag.

Today, the flags are being disposed of properly.

The flag can inspire many of us who share Marie's feelings. Last year, the Citizens Flag Alliance, spearheaded by The American Legion, was instrumental in bringing the flag protection amendment to the floor of the Senate.

Although the amendment failed by just one vote, the CFA was victorious in crystalizing American's feelings about the flag: Poll after poll revealed that over 70 percent of the American people favor a flag amendment. This dedication and commitment to the flag are nothing new.

Leo K. Thorness, recipient of The Congressional Medal of Honor, shared his experiences with an American POW who showed his fellow comrades what it is to be truly free.

They were held captive at the Hao Lo (HOW' low) POW Camp with brutal captors.

One day, a Navy pilot named Mike Christian found the remnants of a handkerchief in a gutter that ran under the prison wall. Christian took the rag into his cell and immediately began to fashion it into a flag.

At night, under his mosquito net, Christian worked on the flag using ground-up roof tiles and tiny amounts of ink to make his red and blue colors.

He painted the colors onto the cloth with watery rice glue and sewed on stars with a homemade bamboo needle and thread from his blanket.

When he finished his work, he whispered to his comrades from his cell, "Hey gang, look here." He proudly held up his makeshift American flag.

His comrades automatically stood straight and saluted, with several holding back tears.

A few days later, the North Vietnamese guards discovered Christian's American flag. They tortured and beat him day and night.

When they pushed him back into his cell, he was badly beaten and emotionally scarred. But he wasn't broken. Despite great physical pain, Christian couldn't wait to start work on Old Glory again. Within two weeks of his torture, he began work on another piece of cloth that would become a homemade emblem of the Stars and Stripes, our national symbol.

The flag, and all that it represents, was worth the sacrifice and the risk of death to POW Mike Christian.

Perhaps Howard Schnauber, a U.S. Marine wounded four times in combat during World War II and once in Korea, captured the essence of Old Glory best when he penned these words entitled, "I am the Flag:"

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I am the flag of the United States of America.

My name is Old Glory.

I fly atop the world's tallest buildings.

I stand watch in America's halls of justice.

I fly majestically over institutions of learning.

I stand guard with power in the world.

Look up and see me.

I stand for peace, honor, truth and justice.

I stand for freedom.

I am confident.

I am arrogant.

I am proud.

When I am flown with my fellow banners, my head is a little higher, my colors a little truer.

I bow to no one!

I am recognized all over the world.

I am worshipped - I am saluted.

I am loved - I am revered.

I am respected - and I am feared.

I was flown at Valley Forge, Gettysburg, Shiloh and Appomattox.

I was there at San Juan Hill, the trenches of France, in the Argonne Forest, Anzio, Rome, the beaches of Normandy, the deserts of Africa, the cane fields of the Philippines, the rice paddies and jungles of Guam, Okinawa, Japan, Korea , Vietnam, Guadalcanal, New Britain, Peleliu, and many more islands.

And a score of places long forgotten by all but those who were with me.

I was there. I led my troops. I watched over them. I was dirty, battle-worn and tired, but my soldiers cheered me.

I was proud.

I have been burned, torn and trampled on the streets of countries I have helped set free. It does not hurt, for I am invincible.

I have been soiled upon, burned, torn and trampled on the streets of my country.

And when it's by those whom I've served in battle - it hurts.

But I shall overcome - for I am strong.

I have slipped the bonds of Earth and stood watch over the uncharted frontiers of space from my vantage point on the moon.

I have borne silent witness to all of America's finest hours.

But my finest hours are yet to come.

When I am torn into strips and used as bandages for my wounded comrades on the battlefield, when I am flown at half-mast to honor my soldiers, or when I lie in the trembling arms of a grieving parent at the grave of their fallen son or daughter, I am proud.

MY NAME IS OLD GLORY.

Dear God, Long may I wave.

(PAUSE)

As you drive home today and see Old Glory flying majestically, remember the words of President Calvin

Coolidge:

“We do honor to the Stars and Strips as the emblem of our country and the symbol of all that our patriotism means.

“We identify the flag with almost everything we hold dear on earth. It represents our peace and security, our civil and political liberty, our freedom of religious worship, our family, our friends, our home. We see it in the great multitude of blessings, of rights and privileges that make up our country.

“But when we look at our flag and behold it emblazoned with all our rights, we must remember that it is equally a symbol of our duties.

“Every glory that we associate with it is the result of duty done. A yearly contemplation of our flag strengthens and purifies the national conscience.”

Today, our troops in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world proudly fight the Global War on Terrorism while serving under that very same flag.

Let us thank God today for a nation that is free, through the blood of patriots who loved Old Glory and the freedom she represents.

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