

The meaning of the 13 Folds of the US Flag

The folding of the U.S. flag during ceremonial occasions, such as military funerals, is a deeply symbolic act, with each of the 13 folds traditionally holding specific meanings. While these meanings are not officially codified by the U.S. government or military, they have become part of a widely recognized and respected tradition.

What is the Significance of The U.S. Flag's Ceremonial Handling?

The portion of the flag denoting honor is the canton of blue containing the stars representing states our veterans served in uniform. The field of blue dresses from left to right and is inverted only when draped as a funeral cloth over the casket of a veteran who has served our country honorably in uniform. In the U.S. Armed Forces, at the ceremony of retreat, the flag is lowered, folded in a triangle and kept under watch throughout the night as a tribute to our nation's honored dead. The next morning it is brought out and, at a ceremony of reveille, flown high as a symbol of belief in the resurrection of the body.

What is the Meaning Behind the 13 Folds of the U.S. Flag?

The flag-folding ceremony represents the same religious principles on which the United States was originally founded.

1. The first fold of our flag is a symbol of life.
2. The second fold is a symbol of our belief in eternal life.
3. The third fold is made in honor and remembrance of the veteran departing our ranks, and who gave a portion of his or her life for the defense of our country to attain peace throughout the world.
4. The fourth fold represents our weaker nature; as American citizens trusting in God, it is Him we turn to in times of peace, as well as in times of war, for His divine guidance.
5. The fifth fold is a tribute to our country. In the words of Stephen Decatur, "Our country, in dealing with other countries, may she always be right, but it is still our country, right or wrong."
6. The sixth fold is for where our hearts lie. It is with our heart that we 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.
7. The seventh fold is a tribute to our [armed forces](#), for it is through the armed forces that we protect our country and our flag against all enemies, whether they be found within or without the boundaries of our republic.
8. The eighth fold is a tribute to the one who entered into the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day, and to honor our mother, for whom it flies on Mother's Day.

9. The ninth fold is a tribute to womanhood. It has been through their faith, love, loyalty and devotion that has molded the character of the men and women who have made this country great.
10. The 10th fold is a tribute to father, who has also given his sons and daughters for the defense of our country since he or she was first born.
11. The 11th fold represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon and glorifies the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
12. The 12th fold represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies God the Father, the Son and Holy Ghost.
13. The 13th and last fold, when the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost, reminding us of our national motto, "In God We Trust."

What Happens After the Flag Folding Ceremony?

After the flag is completely folded and tucked in, it has the appearance of a cocked hat, ever reminding us of the soldiers who served under Gen. George Washington and the sailors and [Marines](#) who served under Capt. John Paul Jones and were followed by their comrades and shipmates in the U.S. Armed Forces, preserving for us the rights, privileges and freedoms we enjoy today.

The source and the date of origin of this Flag Folding Procedure is unknown. However, some sources attribute it to the Gold Star Mothers of America while others to an [Air Force](#) chaplain stationed at the United States [Air Force Academy](#). Some sources also indicate that the 13 folds are a nod to the original first 13 colonies. The flag folding ceremony is provided as a patriotic service.

VA Policy on Flag-Folding Recitation of 13-Fold Ceremony

To ensure burial services at the 143 national cemeteries operated by the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) reflect the wishes of veterans and their families, VA officials have clarified the department's policy about recitations made while the U.S. flag is folded at the grave site of a veteran.

"Honoring the burial wishes of veterans is one of the highest commitments for the men and women of VA," said William F. Tuerk, VA's undersecretary for Memorial Affairs. "A family may request the recitation of words to accompany the meaningful presentation of the American flag as we honor the dedication and sacrifice of their loved ones."

Traditional grave site military funeral honors include the silent folding and presentation of a U.S. flag, three rifle volleys and the playing of "Taps."

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