

The Meaning Behind the 13 Folds of “Old Glory” The Flag of Our Country, The United States of America.

Courtesy of the United States Department of Veteran Affairs

Most Americans have seen the traditional folding of the American flag, at specific events, such as funerals. Have you ever wondered why Old Glory is folded that specific way? Much more than just pomp and circumstance, each of the 13 folds holds special meaning.

The Flag Itself

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.

Meaning Behind the 13 Folds:

The **flag-folding ceremony** represents the same religious principles on which our great country was originally founded. **2 Sir Knights will demonstrate the flag-folding ceremony fold-by-fold as another Sir Knight reads the explanation.**

- The **first fold** of our flag is a symbol of life.
- The **second fold** is a symbol of our belief in eternal life.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.”
- 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.
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- The **12th fold** represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies God the Father, the Son and Holy Ghost.
- 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."

After the 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.

U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (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."