

## Flag Day is June 14

Each year as June 14 approaches, the awareness level of our flag is elevated. For some, this awareness is a year-round part of their being, while for many others, it fades into the background except for the Fourth of July or some other special occasion.

The most recent example of flag fervor took place immediately after the September 11 2001 attack on America by foreign terrorists; the flag made its appearance everywhere; cars and trucks flew them, sometimes with several per vehicle. The ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have kept displays of the flag at a somewhat elevated level, but nothing like the first few months.

Actually, this was predictable, as it follows a pattern evident after any disaster or national emergency. Patriotic groups such as veterans, various youth groups, police and fire departments and others who have a deeper understanding of the symbolism of our national colors know the procedures for displaying, honoring and caring for the national flag. For these groups and individuals, hardly a day goes by that some glaring error is not observed in the procedure of displaying or honoring The Flag.

Many of these discrepancies are not intentional; hanging horizontally, the flag must have the union (blue field of stars) displayed so that it is on the observer's left, if the horizontally displayed flag hangs over a street, the union should be to the north in an east-west street, or to the east in a north-south street. The position of the flag when flown at half-staff is also often done improperly. Basically, there are two positions that may be used; half way between the top of the pole and the bottom, or it may be flown the width of the flag from the peak, or top of the staff. In both cases, the flag is raised all the way to the top, and then lowered to one of the aforementioned positions. At evening time, the half-mast flag must be raised all the way to the top, and then lowered.

If these regulations seem small or picky, remember that they standardize the motions we go through to understand and honor our nation.

Much has been written and spoken of concerning the first flag, with stories of how George Washington came up with one design, Betsey Ross another. As no one knows for sure, I will not speculate upon which, if either of these are accurate, but proceed with the flag as it was perceived and used throughout our subsequent history.

After the War of Independence, when our colors were actually carried into battle, the practice was abandoned until the Mexican War, 1846-47. Regimental colors and standards were previously used. The reasoning behind not carrying the national ensign into battle was that it would be at great risk, with the strong possibility of being captured. In its place were carried the regimental colors. It was only after an area had been secured that the flag was hoisted. The Iwo Jima flag raising was an example of the interpretation "secured", as the battle was surely still raging. As the flag is national symbolism, the example of the Iwo Jima flag raising served both as an inspiration to the Marines waging that battle and ultimately as the image as best representing military victory in the Pacific Theater in WWII, thus its selection for the Marine Memorial in Arlington Cemetery, Virginia.

Today, all schools and most classrooms display the national flag, but this wasn't always so. The first instance of this practice took place in May 1812 at a one-room schoolhouse in Colerain, Massachusetts. The general practice of flying the flag over

schoolhouses did not become common in the North until the Civil War, a practice that has remained in place ever since.

Flying the national ensign is not only to denote possession of territory, or victory over an enemy, but also to display to the citizens at home as well as the rest of the world an act worthy of national pride. Such a case took place on April 6, 1909 when Admiral Robert E. Peary planted the Stars and Stripes at the North Pole, thus becoming the first person ever to reach that isolated spot. Among the events and their dates reflecting glory on the ensign of our country are the following:

First displayed in the Navy by John Paul Jones at Portsmouth, July 2, 1777 on the Ranger, first saluted by the British at the surrender of Burgoyne's army, October 17, 1777; first U. S. flag to be hoisted over a fort of the Old World was the 1795-1818 flag of fifteen stars and fifteen stripes over a fort at Derne, Tripoli, taken by U.S. Marines and Navy personnel during the war with Tripoli in 1805; the first U. S. flag carried around the Cape of Good Hope was aboard the USS Essex in August, 1800, which also carried the first American flag around Cape Horn in 1813.

The first U.S. flag was carried around the world on the American merchant ship Columbia in 1790; Henry Stanley, the famous explorer, first carried the U. S. flag into the interior of Africa in 1871; the first acquisition of territory by the United States through the raising of the U. S. flag took place over the Midway Islands as an incident of the Spanish-American War in 1898; the American flag was first raised over Alaska in 1867 after the purchase of Alaska from Russia.

And the list goes on, but all of these entries highlight the pride that Americans have in their nation. We have that same pride today, and the flag, as the symbolization of the nation, is as vibrant and beautiful as ever. It is fitting that we honor Old Glory on Flag Day, but try and keep her in your hearts the other 364 days of the year as well.

Historic Bytes

Bob Grigg