

Retirement of a flag



1. Dianne Powell, of Journal Inc., lowers this tattered flag from its pole outside the Daily Journal for the last time.



2. According to the U.S. Flag Code, "The Flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."



3. Surrounded by Boy Scouts from Tupelo's Troop 3, scoutmaster Bob Lence cuts 13 stripes from a flag before a retirement ceremony behind First Presbyterian Church in Tupelo.



4. Justin Dunsford, left, places a white stripe on a table in preparation for disposal.



5. Scoutmaster Lence leads his Scouts in saying the Pledge of Allegiance. From left are Spencer Hillhouse, Cole Magers and Gus Depew.



6. Sam Patrick places a white stripe onto the fire. After the Daily Journal flag finished burning, Scouts added other tattered flags to the fire.

The last gleaming

Respect key for flag retirement ceremony

■ Boy Scouts from Tupelo Troop 3 recently destroyed nine well-worn flags.

BY M. SCOTT MORRIS
Daily Journal

TUPELO — Wind and rain don't care about patriotism. Over time, the sun's rays will sap the color out of any fabric, no matter how symbolic.

When elemental forces leave Old Glory threadbare and worn, the last place it should go is on a trash heap.

The U.S. Flag Code is succinct: "The Flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning."

As scoutmaster of Boy Scout Troop 3 in Tupelo, Bob Lence has a duty to know the proper way to retire a flag. The Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, American Legion and the U.S. military routinely dispose of weathered flags.

"That quote from the Flag Code is all the official guidance there is," Lence said on an overcast December day. "There are many different ways to do it. As long as it's a dignified ceremony, it fits the requirement."

'Solemn purpose'

With assistant leaders Cass Patrick and Jim Seiler, Lence and members of Troop 3 recently took nine U.S. flags to a fire ring behind First Presbyterian Church in Tupelo.

With a fire burning strong, Lence and the Scouts gathered around a worn flag that had



Today's nylon flags take longer to burn than cotton flags from years past said scoutmaster Bob Lence.

flown in front of the Daily Journal.

They cut it into its red and white stripes, and kept the blue and white union whole. The Scouts placed the flag's component parts on a wooden table, Lence took his place behind a lectern and the ceremony began.

"We gather here today for that solemn purpose" outlined in the Flag Code, Lence said. A prayer of dedication followed, then the scouts saluted during

the Pledge of Allegiance.

Each Scout picked up a strip of the flag and walked through dried leaves to the crackling fire. Before placing pieces of the flag into the fire, the boys read patriotic quotes from Founders, presidents, soldiers, visionaries and authors (See sidebar).

Scouts' duty

The blue union was last. Two boys placed it on the fire, after Lence read a quote by Calvin

Coolidge:

"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."

After the fire consumed the last of the ceremonial flag, the boys, two by two, added other tattered flags to the blaze. Participants and onlookers were quiet, as black smoke rose into the air.

"It's simple dignity," Lence said after the ceremony.

"Not a lot of pomp," Seiler said.

"No, not a lot of pomp," Patrick said.

At Yocona Area Council Scouting events, 300 to 400 flags could be destroyed during a single ceremony. No matter what the number, the overriding principle is the same: respect.

With their duty complete, most of the scouts were free to go about their days, while some stayed to put out the fire.

But before everyone went their separate ways, a gentle breeze rustled in the trees and soft sunlight poked through the clouds.

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Remington Hood, center, studies the quote he's to read during the ceremony. He's flanked by Spencer Hillhouse, left, and Cole Magers.

PATRIOTIC THOUGHTS

■ During a recent retirement ceremony for U.S. flags, members of Boy Scout Troop 3 and others in attendance considered these thoughts:

- "We have nothing to fear — but fear itself." — Franklin D. Roosevelt.
- "I have not yet begun to fight." — John Paul Jones.
- "Millions for defense, not one cent for tribute." — James Monroe.
- "Give me liberty, or give me death!" — Patrick Henry.
- "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." — Thomas Jefferson.
- "Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation..." — Abraham Lincoln.
- "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." — John F. Kennedy.
- "They that give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." — Benjamin Franklin.
- "I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country." — Nathan Hale.
- "We must be free not because we claim freedom, but because we prac-

They can help

■ If you have an old flag that needs to be retired, contact one of the following:

- Boy Scouts Yocona Area Council, (662) 842-2871.
- Girl Scouts Heart of the South, (662) 844-7577.
- American Legion Post No. 49, (662) 842-9231.
- Woodmen of the World, (662) 690-8008, 255-6347 or 842-9233.

tice it." — William Faulkner.

• "One nation under God, with liberty and justice for all." — Pledge of Allegiance.

• "... (T)hat government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from this earth." — Abraham Lincoln

• "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." — Neil Armstrong

• "I have a dream..." — Martin Luther King Jr.

• "Our obligations to our country never cease..." — John Adams.