**Americanism**

Good afternoon line officers, members, and guests of the Virginia DAV Auxiliary.

 The time has come for me to step down as the Americanism Chair for the great state of Virginia. The love of this Country, of the active and retired members of our military, and of the American Flag representing our original colonies and our present 50 United States sometimes brings me tears of joy, other times tears of heartache.

 Our Country celebrates our most somber holiday, Memorial Day, with remembrance ceremonies at War Memorials, Veteran Cemeteries, and other locations. Lots of families host cookouts, the swimming pools open, and it marks the beginning of “Summer”.

On June 14 we honor “Old Glory”, the flag of the United States of America. Many organizations perform rituals to dispose of worn flags on this day.

July 4th celebrations are held across the Country commemorating the birth of the USA.

These three “days” hold different meanings for different people. Through working with and getting to know veterans and their families and by spending time at the VA hospital, at the DAV Chapter building, and at various functions, the meaning of these days for me has changed. Today the meaning is “gratitude”. The definition of Gratitude is: “the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness”. For me, Gratitude is an action word. I am grateful for the opportunity to live in this great country full of people who have the freedom to be whomever and whatever they please. We have this freedom because our forefathers (and mothers!) wanted something better. Our service men and women have fought for our freedom at home and abroad for hundreds of years. I owe them all a debt of gratitude I can never repay. I can show my gratitude by thanking a veteran, by helping a veteran’s family, by respecting our Flag, by voting, and by passing on my love of MY Country to my children, my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren, and anyone else I might meet in the future.

I am including the Military version of the “Meaning Behind the 13 Folds”. I hope no one is offended by this version. It was written during a different time in our country’s life. My belief is these words can be applied to any religion, I pray no one is offended by them.

Respectfully submitted,

Patti Whitlow

Americanism Chair

 **Meaning Behind the 13 Folds**

The flag-folding ceremony represents the same religious principles on which our great country 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](http://www.military.com/join-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."

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](http://www.military.com/marine-corps) 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](http://www.military.com/air-force) chaplain stationed at the United States [Air Force Academy](http://www.military.com/base-guide/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.