

## In Honor of those Slain in Battle

Another Veteran's Day has come and gone, another chance to honor those who served in the defense of our country, and especially those who gave their most precious gift to keep it safe.

Though some in our community gave their lives in World War II, most were brought home for interment. One young man, Theo Charley McDonald, was not to come home. A navy man, his ship, the *Astoria*, was lost at sea in a great naval battle, and his body was committed to the deep.

His family was left with nothing...no body to prepare, no young face on which his mother could gaze one last time, just an empty chair at their table and an empty spot in their hearts.

As at all times such as this the community rallied to the family. This bitter blow had to be dealt with, and honor must be done for his sacrifice.

On the appointed day the community gathered on Oak Street, and a solemn parade commemorated his passing, not once, but twice up and down the street. The procession then turned up First Street and ended at the high school auditorium.

Inside, the service began in silence with the advance of the colors. The chaplain gave the invocation and the service officer led a moment of silent prayer as the audience turned to face the west in honor of the sacrifice of their World War I comrades.

The service officer then read the hated telegram that crushed their lives: "The Navy Department deeply regrets to inform you that your son, Theo Charley McDonald, Fireman First Class U. S. Navy, was killed in action in the performance of his duty and in the service of his country..."

With these words the Legion commander presented Theo's mother with a flag upon which had been embroidered his name: "From a grateful nation through the American Legion we present you with this flag that our comrade so honorably served under." It was an honorable gesture, but a poor substitute for her beloved son. The flag had 13 precise folds with sharp creases, and each fold had meaning: the first symbolized life, the third was in remembrance of comrades in arms who had also given their lives, the seventh fold was in tribute to the United States Armed Forces.

A single poppy of valor was laid upon the Legion wreath of remembrance, while in the distance three sharp volleys from the firing squad brought everyone to attention.

From somewhere in the crowded auditorium the lonely sounds of "Taps" drifted across the air, mingled with muffled sobs of grief.

The chaplain gave the benediction...the high school band played a patriotic march...the colors were retired...the service was over.

The family placed a marker at the cemetery honoring Theo's life, a place to go to mourn his loss, but even that, like his body, was lost to another torrent of water.

Today, we honor Theo Charley McDonald and the ultimate sacrifice that he and hundreds of thousands of other men and women have made in all conflicts, to protect our lives...our property...our liberty...our American way of life. And now, whoever sees or hears these words can keep his memory alive, as we honor him and those who gave "the last full measure of devotion."



THEO C. McDONALD

### WHY THE AMERICAN FLAG IS FOLDED 13 TIMES

Have you ever wondered why the Flag of the United States of America is folded 13 times when it is lowered or when it is folded and handed to the next of kin at the burial of a veteran?

Here is the meaning of each of those folds and what it means:

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 veterans departing our ranks who gave a portion of their lives for the defense of our country to attain peace throughout the world.

The fourth fold represents our weaker nature, for as American citizens trusting, it is to Him we turn in times of peace as well as in time of war for His divine guidance.

The fifth fold is a tribute to our country, for 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 her 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 mother, for whom it flies on Mother's Day.

The ninth fold is a tribute to womanhood; for it has been through their faith, their love, loyalty and devotion that the character of the men and women who have made this country great has been molded.

The tenth fold is a tribute to the father, for he, too, has given his sons and daughters for the defense of our country since they were first born.

The eleventh fold, in the eyes of a Hebrew citizen represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon, and glorifies in their eyes, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The twelfth fold, in the eyes of a Christian citizen, represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies, in their eyes, God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.

When the Flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost reminding us of our Nation's motto, "In God We Trust." After the Flag is completely folded and tucked in, it takes on the appearance of a cocked hat, ever reminding us of the soldiers who served under General George Washington, and the Sailors and Marines who served under Captain John Paul Jones, who were followed by their comrades and shipmates in the Armed Forces of the United States, preserving for us the rights, privileges, and freedoms we enjoy today.

The next time you see a Flag ceremony honoring someone that has served our country, either in the Armed Forces or in our civilian services such as the Police Force or Fire Department, keep in mind all the important reasons behind each and every movement. They have paid the ultimate sacrifice for all of us by honoring our Flag and our Country.

*Author Unknown*

*The United States government assigns no meaning to the folds, and no meanings to the colors. In fact, the sizes and proportions were never specified by the US government until 1959, when President Eisenhower signed the executive order adding the 50th star to the flag.*

**"In Honor of Those Slain in Battle," by C.W. (Bill) Smith, curator, Terrell County Memorial Museum, Sanderson, Texas**

**"Why the American Flag is Folded 13 Times," courtesy of Troop 267, Boy Scouts of America, Midwest City, Oklahoma, <http://www.t267.org/>**