



AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY

Unflagging Support for the Military



Left: Members of the Cape Henlopen High School's Junior ROTC program demonstrate the proper way to fold the American flag.

Middle: Jean Maxwell, a member of the Lewes American Legion Women's Auxiliary (Unit 17), shows Macy Davis how to replicate the 13 folds of the American flag in a miniature flag that will be distributed to soldiers.

Bottom: Shields Elementary students Angelina McCarthy, left, and Madilynne O'Malley take their flag-folding responsibilities seriously.

For most Americans, the U.S. flag represents liberty, justice and freedom. For Americans in the military serving abroad, it represents this and more — a connection to home. That is why each year, just before Veterans Day, the Lewes American Legion Women's Auxiliary (Unit 17) works with local elementary schoolchildren to package miniature flags that are given to service men and women deploying overseas.

The Pocket Flag Project began in October 2001 after American Legion auxiliary members met with Boy Scout leaders who had served in the Vietnam and Persian Gulf wars and who carried small folded flags with them in their left shirt pockets. The auxiliary initially began working with Cub Scouts on the project, but the program eventually expanded to include schoolchildren of all ages. There are now groups in all 50 states and several foreign countries; they have collectively distributed more than 2.5 million flags.

After learning about the flag and how to properly fold it, participants fold and package miniature flags that are placed in



3-inch-by-3-inch plastic bags along with cards that say: "A flag for your pocket so you can always carry a little piece of home. We are praying for you and we are

proud of you. Thank you for defending our country and our freedom." Each child also writes a short note on the back of the card, along with his or her first name.

In 2017, the Lewes American Legion auxiliary visited second-, third- and fifth-graders at Shields Elementary School in Lewes, where more than 200 children took part in the flag-folding exercise. This year auxiliary members will visit students at Love Creek Elementary School on Route 24 near Midway.

Macy Davis, a dark-haired Shields student sporting an Eiffel tower T-shirt, said the project was special to her because her mother is in the Air Force and works at Dover Air Force Base. Macy who is now a fourth-grader, wrote on the back of her card, "Thank you for Serving Our Country."

Sasha Robbins, also now a fourth-grader, wrote, "Thank you for keeping the world safe" and added, "My Pop-Pop used to be in the military, and I think we should thank them more!"

Also taking the task seriously were then-second-grader Lynette Garcia-

Raygadas and then-third-grader Brennan Wilson, who said he really enjoyed learning to fold a flag.

Cadets from Cape Henlopen High School's Junior ROTC program assist the auxiliary with teaching flag etiquette to students each year, even explaining what the 13 folds of the flag represent (see below), as well as the symbolism of the 13 stripes and 50 stars.

"I love seeing the looks on the children's faces when they see us walk in in uniform," said Atonia Panchoo, who

was a senior cadet last year. Callee Miller, also a senior in 2017, hoped the students will share what they learn with their families.

"It's a great experience for both the children and cadets," notes Judi Hammond, an auxiliary member. "We give out the flag to deploying soldiers, so they can take a piece of America with them. It's something special to them, and it's something special to us." ■

— Kimberly Scott

The Meanings Behind the Folds



Each flag is packaged with this note for the service member, with a handwritten message from the student on the back.

According to the American Legion:

The first fold is a symbol of life.

The second fold symbolizes belief in eternal life.

The third fold is made in honor and remembrance of the veteran's departing rank, who gave a portion of his or her life to the defense of our country to attain peace throughout the world.

The fourth fold stands for our weaker nature; as American citizens trusting in God, it's to Him we turn in times of peace as well as war for His divining guidance.

The fifth fold is a tribute to America. 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 where our heart lies. It's with our flag that we pledge allegiance to the flag and the republic it stands for.

The seventh fold is a tribute to our armed forces. For it is the armed forces that protect our country and flag against enemies, whether they be domestic or foreign.

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, for it is through their faith, love, loyalty and devotion that the character of the men and women who have made this country great have been molded.

The 10th fold is a tribute to father, for he has given his sons and daughters for the defense of our country since he or she was first born.

The 11th fold, in the eyes of Hebrew citizens, 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 12th 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 Ghost.

When the flag is completely folded, which some consider **the 13th fold**, the stars are uppermost, reminding us of our national motto, "In God We Trust." ■



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