



## The United States Flag

The symbol of the nation is the American flag. It has 13 red and white stripes with 50 white stars on a field of blue. The first flag had only 13 stars and stripes, one for each new state of the new nation. As states were added, a star and a stripe were added. The Star-Spangled Banner had 15 stars and stripes flying over Fort McHenry in 1814 when Francis Scott Key wrote his poem.

The flag is more than just a symbol of the nation. It is the expression of an idea of freedom and individual rights. It is a rallying point for the nation's military. Stephen Crane's novel *The Red Badge of Courage* is about an individual in combat finding courage by picking up a fallen flag on the battlefield. Frederic Remington and other artists created images of American troops carrying the flag into combat. Remington images were used by John Ford in several of his films on the Western frontier.

The fact is that the American flag symbolized the prestige of the nation and the military. Units that lost their regimental flag on the battlefield brought disgrace to the unit for the loss of the unit's colors. Before 1834, the Army was not allowed to carry the United States flag into battle. Units carried only their unit colors into combat. That year, a change was made that allowed artillery units to display the U.S. flag along with regimental colors in battle. The United States Marine Corps was not allowed to carry the United States flag into battle until 1876, and the U.S. Cavalry was allowed to do it in 1887. Films and paintings showing American troops with the American flag charging the Confederate line during the Civil War are in error. Stephen Crane's soldier was picking up regimental colors, not the American flag.

Since 1775, there have been nearly three million men and women in the defense of this nation and the flag who have died in combat. One not only honors the flag of the nation but also recognizes the sacrifice of those who have died and those who answered the call of the nation in times of need. They deserve the respect for the freedom of speech and the ability to hear what others have to say.

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