

Flag 482

By Tom Buchanan

Sometimes emotions sneak right up on me and stop in my tracks without fanfare or even a drum roll. Sunday afternoon, November 23, 2008 was one of those occasions. I went down to the empty the Loveland Marine Corps League's flag disposal bin. Upon returning home my usual routine is to separate, count and carefully place the banners in bags of fifty.

The flags we get are properly retired in a bin that only American flags get the distinguished honor of being burned in. I am careful to remove any foreign material like plastic bags or boxes that held the flags on their trip to the disposal bin and prepare them for their final journey to a proper retirement.

For the most part the flags are a pile of stars and stripes in varying degrees of sizes and wear. Many are what I call "Faded Glories". They are intact, obviously made well, but have spent too much time in the sun and their colors are not as proud as they once were. Then there are the "Ragged Glories", that the stitching holding the stripes together did not stand the Colorado wind test. I often wonder how anyone could fly some of these colors in such condition.

I often wonder about the history of some of these flags. I suppose for the most part people fly a flag that was purchased to show respect for a holiday like Independence Day, Memorial Day or Flag Day. Then there are those special flags that have more of a history. It was one of these that made numerous trips to empty the flag bin worth every minute. This is the story of Flag 482.

When I was counting the flags in the back of my car, number 482 was carefully wrapped like a special present. I could see a folded sheet of paper through the thin scotch taped tissue paper. I opened the wrapper to retrieve the note. I figured that someone took the time to write that note and someone ought to read it.

Flag 482 was addressed to the Loveland Marine Corps League and went unsigned. This is the content of that letter, which I read in my driveway.

Loveland Marine Corps League Detachment 1250

Hello,

I read the article in the Reporter Herald about your flag collection bin. This flag belonged to my Dad and flew at our home. I have had it since he passed away. It had become so worn because I had flown it almost daily at my home here in Loveland while our troops have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. In respect, I finally replaced it.

My Dad was a Lieutenant in the Army during WWII. During his service, among many things, he fought to liberate a town in France, rescued a U.S. downed pilot who gave him his flight jacket in gratitude, which I now have, then was badly wounded. His men thought that he died that day until one of them saw him during his recuperation. My Mom was a U.S Army nurse who he met after the war ended. My brother was a Ranger in Vietnam and my Dad followed his movements during my high school years as best he could, with a map of Vietnam on our kitchen wall, push

pins and reports from Dan Rather and Walter Cronkite.

Thank you for your service to properly retire his flag.

With My Grateful Regards

After reading this note I started to walk up the driveway towards the side door of the house and it was as though a bucket of emotion fell out of the sky and washed over me. My arms tingled with goose bumps and my eye sockets swelled with moisture, my vision got blurry and in a few seconds tears ran down my cheeks. I could not believe what was happening. I just stood there dumbfounded, trying to regain some semblance of composure. I went in the house and my wife, Dorié asked what was wrong and all I could do was show her the letter and shed a few more tears.

From now on when I see an American Flag flying outside of someone's house I will wonder if that will be one of the many countless "Faded or Ragged Glories" that will be deposited into the Marine Corps League Flag Disposal Bin or will it be someone's honored flag that was dedicated to someone special that they thought about every time they raised and furled it into the gentle breezes and blue sky. Will it come with a note that may well bring on a tide of unexpected emotion?

We all need to be thankful for living in such a wonderful country and even more thankful of all the veterans that sacrificed so much to bring to reality Sir Francis Scott Keys' immortal words "Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?"

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