

BREAKING THE COLORS

QUESTION - Is “breaking the colors” a violation of the United States Flag Code?

ANSWER: NO

INTERPRETATION:

There are no provisions in the Flag Code, which deal with the intrusion by a person and/or objects between the station of the Commander (or President as the case may be) and the American Flag or between the American Flag and the Legion banner.

Legion protocol and tradition have, however, developed a meaningful custom which, when treated with reason, brings honor and respect to our fallen comrades.

General Instruction Number 3, listed in the current edition of the American Legion Officers Guide and Manual of Ceremonies, states

— “Comrades shall be careful never to pass between the Flags and the station of the Commander.” Written in the formative years of our organization, this statement has spawned the tradition associated with the “Breaking of the Colors”.

(This information is copied from the National Americanism Commission issue of ACT — Lee A. Hardy’s article — in the hope that it will clarify any misunderstanding regarding “Breaking the Colors”. It is strictly an American Legion and Auxiliary tradition of showing honor and respect to our deceased veterans.)

We would certainly not attempt to detract from this beautiful tribute to our fallen veterans; however, we would suggest that there are times when physical restraints will sometimes cause an excusable trespass in the “Breaking of Colors”. Every stage and auditorium is different. Access to the stage and the officers conducting business may be confined by unavoidable circumstances. COMMON SENSE should determine whether or not the violation is unavoidable.

The other concern in this situation is knowledge. Quite obviously our members know the tradition of “hallowed ground”, but how many really know the Legion tradition? Sometimes “Breaking the colors” may be an unintentional intrusion rather than a premeditated encroachment upon the “hallowed ground”, We encourage you to obtain a current copy of the United States Flag Code and learn its rules and customs for proper conduct in respect to the American Flag. Then pass on that knowledge to all your friends and members.

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WHY YOU DON'T WALK BETWEEN THE COLORS

THIS IS HALLOWED GROUND

Between these flags that proudly fly
Let no man dare to stand,
For here our fallen comrades lie,
A symbol, yes, but mark it well;
Here let us ever humbly pause
In memory of the lads who fell
In fighting for our sacred cause.

On sea or land these buddies died.
Some lie beneath a foreign sod
In graves caressed by winds and tide,
In spots unknown to all but God.
And so, this place is hallowed ground.
And it shall be forever blest
As though it were a grassy mound
Beneath which gallant heroes rest.

Be ever watchful. Legionnaire.
Of those two flags which signify
That we should guard this spot with care
Where our departed comrades lie.
And, if a man should dare to tread
This spot where lie our gallant brave,
He desecrates those noble dead
As though he walked upon their grave.