

AMERICANISM AMBASSADOR / PATRIOTIC INSTRUCTOR



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More Than Letters

The words we use are immensely important! Just as our nation was “spoken into existence” so too we must speak the words we need people to hear in order to manifest the reaction we want to see. For expedience, more than anything else, we tend to shorten things or use acronyms. The acronyms, while accurate, don’t pack the same punch as saying the entire word. This year and going forward, I encourage you to use **#MoreThanLetters** especially when referring to our POWs, MIAs and KIAs. They are more than letters. Encourage the use of the words:

Prisoner(s) of War, Missing in Action, Killed in Action

- Acknowledge them daily
- Learn and say their names
- Have a dedication ceremony
- Host a special program
- Write about them in your newsletter
- Share their stories
- Meet their families
- If your state has a POW/MIA Day ceremony at the Capitol, GO! If it doesn’t, start one.

Fly the POW/MIA flag under “Old Glory.”

Ask your governor to issue a proclamation acknowledging the third Friday in September as POW/MIA Remembrance Day.

Remember, not all of our treasured service members returned home from their duty protecting us and our way of life. So really, our celebration of other patriotic holidays (while important) would not be possible without those who put their lives on the line, who were

taken prisoner, went missing in action, or who were killed in action defending and guarding the nation. We must all remember that and include an acknowledgment of them in every holiday observance.

Present day America is the only nation on earth which was established as an ideal. Other nations rely upon the tribal bonds (racial and/or ethnic) of their people or the geographic constraints of their traditional homelands to be recognized as a nation or people. America is solely unique in that it was “conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” - Abraham Lincoln.

America is in fact a concept; a pronoun for the mystical agreement into which her people, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, social status or ability, must enter daily. That unseen and unspoken agreement unites them more fully and securely to one another than anything else can because they must choose it daily. What this means is Americans are Americans because THEY SAY SO! We must agree and declare for ourselves that our neighbors are our compatriots because they are Americans in order for our citizenship to live in us and for us to live in it!

America is an almost perfectly realized vision. Though the founders of our nation were far from perfect, their concept of what this new nation could and should be was as close to pure as may earthly be expected of any society. We have been guaranteed in our founding documents the unabridged right to grow and achieve without limits. Such freedom is unmatched and worth every ounce of devotion we may give. It is ours to nurture, safeguard and pass on to future generations. In this way, America is also a verb; one which requires the action of her people to survive and thrive!

Americans are passionate about being Americans!
Americanism is:

- Freedom and opportunity
- Ideal of loyalty
- Cultural, political and moral virtue
- Public ideology
- Honoring diversity
- A declaration of unity
- Defined by its rights AND responsibilities
- A shared vision and security
- Spoken into existence
- Chosen daily by its people
- Celebrating patriotic holidays together
- United under and honoring the Flag

The celebration of our patriotic holidays, the hearts that swell with pride, inspired by hearing our national anthem and the respect paid to our national standard (Old Glory, the red, white, and blue: The Flag) are the hallmarks of the precious freedom we enjoy as American citizens, and it is every American's duty to pass on the awesome story of this nation to her next generation!

Patriotic Instructor

Here's why it's important to know American and Auxiliary traditions: it bonds us together in a kinesthetic and visual way, ties us to our past, and gives us a strong foundation on which to build an inspiring future.

#AuxTRIBE*

Perhaps the American spirit and Americanism are most closely achieved by her citizens who serve in the military. At basic training, all recruits are "stripped" of their individualized selves through a crucible of exertion, toil and physical strain. One may rightly say that they are broken down to their base humanity and rebuilt into an ideal soldier, sailor, marine and citizen. The recruit is encouraged by their battle buddies to endure and bonded to them for their shared strength and skill. They rightly feel elevated, honored, special and necessary. They feel like they are a part of something great, and they have a clearly defined common goal and lifestyle. At the end of the process, they are a new creation, for all intents and purposes, they are members of a new #AuxTRIBE.

When many of our servicemen and servicewomen leave the service, they can feel displaced, depressed, disillusioned, and lost without the identity they shared with their comrades. Often, this is identified as:

- Post
- Traumatic
- Stress

Their feelings are chalked up to battle fatigue or exposures to the extreme experiences of combat. Ponder with me if you will that PTS might also be defined as:

- Post
- Tribal
- Separation

The extreme feeling of being out of uniform, without their comrades, and lacking a common mission with those around them. They long to talk about their shared experiences and be amongst those who not only value their service but understand it.

This is where we come in. We provide that community that they are looking for. We become their #AuxTRIBE. Our Auxiliary traditions, uniform and mission to serve veterans and their families, are recognizably similar to the traditions, uniforms and mission they had in the service.

When we know and adhere to the Auxiliary traditions and rituals, we create the environment that these veterans are yearning for:

- Embody brother/sisterhood
- Protect the peace of our Post(s)
- Be there for each other
- Learn and practice your VFW Auxiliary rituals
- Proudly wear our uniforms/and gear
- Encourage #AuxTRIBE mentality

Everything we do should build up our #AuxTRIBE and draw in our veterans!

* **Tribe:** A social group made up of many families or generations that share the same language, customs and beliefs; a group of persons with a common character, occupation or interest.

AMERICANISM PROGRAM

Flag Education • Promote #AuxiliaryPatriotism • POW/MIA Recognition • Star Family Recognition

This definition of “Americanism” was originated by the Commanders-in-Chief of the Grand Army of the Republic, United Spanish War Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, the National Commanders of the American Legion and the Disabled American Veterans of the World War at a conference held in Washington, D.C., in February 1927:

“Americanism is an unflinching love of country; loyalty to its institutions and ideals; eagerness to defend it against all enemies; undivided allegiance to the Flag; and a desire to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and posterity.”

Patriotic Instructors

The Patriotic Instructor educates members about the proper salute to the U.S. Flag, as well as the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. He or she also takes the time to understand the VFW Auxiliary Ritual and the Federal Flag Code. He or she helps members to understand the traditions and ceremonies of the organization. The *Understanding Auxiliary Traditions* helpsheet and video are available in MALTA Member Resources.

For detailed information on Auxiliary traditions, rituals and patriotic ceremonies, reference the *VFW Auxiliary Podium Edition: Bylaws and Ritual*. Patriotic items and educational materials are available for purchase through the VFW Store at 1-833-VFW-VETS or online at vfwstore.org.

Flag Education

A large part of demonstrating Americanism and patriotic spirit is respecting and properly caring for the U.S. Flag. Flag etiquette covers everything from proper display of our Flag to acceptable conduct around this symbol of our nation.

For more information about Flag etiquette, the history of our Flag and to read the U.S. Flag Code, visit vfw.org/community/flag-etiquette.

Respect for the Flag - Engaging the Community

- Flag Education in Schools – Educating our youth about patriotism is an important step on the path to good citizenship. Encourage members of your Auxiliary to volunteer in schools and educate youth about the importance of respecting our Flag. Volunteers can visit individual classrooms or give a presentation at a school assembly. For more resources, see MALTA Member Resources.
- Recognition of Outstanding Community Flag Display – When a community member, business or organization takes the care and time to display our “Stars and Stripes,” it reinforces patriotism to the entire community. You may recognize this display of patriotism by presenting a certificate of appreciation from your Auxiliary.
- Flag Retirement Ceremonies – These ceremonies honoring our Flag serve as one of the most beautiful forms of respect for our country. This is the perfect way to involve the whole family of Auxiliary and VFW members. Flag retirement ceremonies can also serve as an event involving the entire community. For more information on this and other Flag etiquette, refer to MALTA Member Resources.

Promote Patriotism – Celebrating Patriotic Holidays

Patriotic holidays are an opportune time to involve the whole family and bring community attention to your Auxiliary. When fun family events are presented to the community, prospective new members will walk through your door. Patriotic holidays can serve as the perfect way to show that your Auxiliary supports patriotism, veterans and their families as a top priority. For more information about patriotic days and ways to celebrate, visit MALTA Member Resources.

National Vietnam War Veterans Day – March 29
National Vietnam War Veterans Day honors a generation of men and women who served and sacrificed. March 29 marks the anniversary of when the last combat forces departed South Vietnam in 1973, even though some troops remained until their final departure in 1975.

Loyalty Day – May 1

On May 1, 1930, 10,000 VFW members staged a rally at New York's Union Square to promote patriotism. Through a resolution adopted in 1949, May 1 evolved into Loyalty Day.

Armed Forces Day – Third Saturday in May

A day to pay tribute to the men and women currently serving in our nation's armed forces.

Memorial Day – May 30 (Traditional)

Patriotism calls for all citizens to be reminded of the deaths of their fellow countrymen during wartime. By honoring the nation's war dead, we preserve their memory and thus their service and sacrifice.

Flag Day – June 14

This day celebrates the official symbol for the United States: our "Stars and Stripes." Flag Day was first recognized by Congress on June 14, 1777.

Independence Day – July 4

On this day in 1776, our forefathers formed a new nation by adopting the Declaration of Independence.

Patriot Day – September 11

This day is to perpetuate the memory of those who perished in the attack on America that occurred on this date in 2001.

POW/MIA Recognition Day - Third Friday in September

POW/MIA Recognition Day honors the commitments and the sacrifices made by our nation's prisoners of war and those who are still missing in action. National POW/MIA Recognition Day, traditionally on the third Friday in September, is one of the 6 days specified by law on which the black POW/MIA flag shall be flown over federal facilities and cemeteries, post offices and military installations.

Auxiliary members are passionate about bringing attention to former prisoners of war and those missing in action by holding ceremonies to both educate their communities and honor these special veterans. One way to honor these veterans and educate youth and the community on this subject is by having a Missing Man Table Ceremony. This practice provides a visual demonstration of the significance of POW/MIA Recognition Day. You are encouraged to share this ceremony with youth groups partnering with the Auxiliary. Find a sample of the ceremony wording and table setup in MALTA Member Resources.

Gold Star Mother's & Family's Day -

Last Sunday in September

On this day, Americans are encouraged to display the Flag and hold appropriate ceremonies as a public expression of our nation's gratitude and respect for our Gold Star Mothers and Families.

Veterans Day – November 11

This is an opportunity to honor the brave men and women, both living and deceased, who fought America's battles past and present.

Pearl Harbor Day – December 7

This day is in remembrance of the same date in 1941 when Japanese bombers staged a surprise attack on U.S. military and naval forces in Hawaii.

Branch of Service Birth Dates

- U.S. Army - June 14, 1775
- U.S. Marine Corps - November 10, 1775
- U.S. Navy - October 13, 1775
- U.S. Air Force - September 18, 1947
- U.S. Coast Guard - August 4, 1790
- U.S. National Guard - December 13, 1636
- U.S. Space Force - December 20, 2019

Military Flags Order of Precedence

According to Department of Defense guidelines, military service flags, insignias, etc., should be displayed in the following order (left to right as you face the flags): Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force and Coast Guard.

Star Family Recognition

You may have seen a Blue Star, Gold Star or Silver Star service flag or service banner in the window of a home in your area. A service flag or service banner is a banner approved by the Secretary of Defense that family members of those serving in the United States Armed Forces can display.

- Blue Star Families can display a flag or banner with a white field and a red border, with a blue star for each family member serving in the United States Armed Forces during any period of war or hostilities.
- Gold Star Families can display a flag or banner with a white field and a red border, with a gold star that represents a family member who died during military operations.
- Silver Star Families can display a flag or banner with a blue, an outer red and inner white border, with a silver star that represents a family member who was injured, wounded or became ill during or as a result of combat.

You are encouraged to recognize and honor these families in your community.

AMERICANISM PROGRAM AWARDS

Awards for Auxiliaries

1. Most outstanding activity and/or event educating their community that our VFW Auxiliary acronyms are “more than letters.”
 - Citation to every Auxiliary that hosts an activity and/or event that educates their community that our VFW Auxiliary acronyms are “more than letters.” Entry form required and available in MALTA Member Resources. Auxiliaries must send the entry form to their Department Americanism Chairman by March 31, 2024 for judging. The Department Americanism Chairman must email National Headquarters by April 30, 2024 at info@vfwauxiliary.org a total combined list of every Auxiliary in their Department that completed and submitted an entry form.

Citations will be mailed directly to participating Auxiliaries from National Headquarters.

- Citation and \$25 to one Auxiliary in each of the four Conferences that hosts the most outstanding activity and/or event educating their community that our VFW Auxiliary acronyms are “more than letters.”

The Department Americanism Chairman must sign and send a copy of the completed Department-winning entry form to the National Americanism Ambassador by April 30, 2024 for judging.

Citations will be mailed directly to winning Auxiliaries from National Headquarters and money will be deposited into Auxiliary account after National Convention.

Awards for Departments and Department Chairmen

1. \$25 VFW Store gift certificate to one Department Americanism Chairman in each of the 10 Program Divisions for the best promotion that demonstrates VFW Auxiliary acronyms are “more than letters.” Winners will be announced and awards presented at the 2024 National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky.
2. Outstanding Performance Award in each of the 10 Program Divisions based on the criteria listed on Page 5 and for the promotion of the Program goals listed at the top of Page 9. Winners will be announced and awards presented at the 2024 National Convention in Louisville, Kentucky.