



***January 16, 2025***  
***Pentagon drops ban on servicemembers displaying US flags horizontally at big events***

***Updated guidelines follow changes to the U.S. Flag Code under the latest National Defense Authorization Act.***

American servicemembers can once again display the U.S. flag horizontally at sporting events and other official ceremonies, the Pentagon said in a memo that reverses restrictions enacted two years ago.

Defense Department personnel may now show the flag, “regardless of its size or position, at eligible public sporting and other community events, provided that such displays are done in a respectful manner,” a DOD memo issued Friday said.

The updated guidelines follow changes to the U.S. Flag Code under the latest National Defense Authorization Act. The purpose of the code is to provide guidance on properly displaying the flag, including details regarding size, placement and handling.

Under the old rules outlined on Feb. 10, 2023, uniformed service members were barred from participating directly in the “unfurling, holding, and/or carrying of giant horizontal U.S. flags.” Military jump teams also were formerly prevented from incorporating the U.S. flag in their demonstrations if it couldn’t “be caught reliably and handled respectfully by ground personnel.”

It remains against DOD rules for flags to land on the ground during parachute demonstrations in which they are attached to the jumper, according to the memo, signed by Chris Meagher, assistant to the secretary of defense for public affairs.

The rules must be followed by DOD personnel handling the flag at events in the U.S. and abroad.

Servicemembers traditionally unfurl the flag at the Super Bowl and other major American sporting events. They have also been used in flag displays at National Football League and Major League Baseball games in foreign countries.

The Flag Code is referenced in DoD regulations. According to the code, the Stars and Stripes should never touch anything beneath it, including the ground, floor, water or merchandise. An exception is made for caskets draped in the flag during funeral honors so long as it isn’t lowered into the grave or allowed to touch the ground.

While the revisions maintain that the flag usually should not be carried flat, they allow for exceptions that “may be necessary in limited circumstances.” That stipulation was absent in the 2023 DOD guidance.

Pentagon officials have been concerned with flag protocol in recent years and addressed troops on the issue in earlier memos. In 2020, DOD issued a policy that banned the display of unauthorized flags on military installations, buildings and vehicles.

It effectively prohibited Confederate flags and other controversial banners without spelling out which flags were off-limits.

In the wake of the 2023 memo that was overturned last week, Meagher encouraged bases “to work with sponsors of community events to develop other ways to showcase the patriotism and capabilities of our military.”

***American Legion***