

**COMBINED JOINT TASK FORCE- 82
COMBINED PRESS INFORMATION CENTER
BAGRAM AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN
APO AE 09354
Press Center : 0799-063-013 bagrammediacenter@afghan.swa.army.mil
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Why don't we honor our fallen servicemembers?

**By Army Sgt. Jim Wilt
Combined Joint Task Force-82 Public Affairs Office**

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan - Following the deaths of 32 Virginia Tech students, the President of the United States ordered that all American flags be flown at half-staff for one week.

In accordance with the president's order, the U.S. flag at Bagram Airfield was raised to half-staff.

The deaths of the 32 students are a tragedy that was felt throughout the world. Even Afghan President Hamid Karazi gave his condolences to the U.S. on the loss of so many young lives. The president of a country, which has seen more than its fair share of young deaths, tipped his proverbial hat to these young people.

But I find it ironic that the flags were flown at half-staff for the young men and women who were killed at VT yet it is never lowered for the death of a U.S. servicemember.

Is the life of Sgt. Alexander Van Aalten, a member of our very own task force, killed April 20 in Helmand province not valued the same as these 32 students? Surely his death was as violent as the students.

Aalten's death lacked the shock factor of the Virginia massacre. It is a daily occurrence these days to see X number of U.S. troops killed in Iraq or Afghanistan scrolling across the ticker at the bottom of the TV screen. People have come to expect casualty counts in the nightly news; they don't expect to see 32 students killed.

Also, more parents have children in school than children in the military. This makes the deaths hit closer to home for a lot of people.

The deaths of our friends and family members in the military are not forgotten by the citizens of our great country. We see this as people line the streets to honor those who lost their lives fighting for the freedom of our country and the freedom of other countries.

Individual states have taken it upon themselves to raise their flags to half-mast when one of their children dies.

I think it is sad that we do not raise the bases' flag to half-staff when a member of our own task force dies. Department of Defense directives mandate we honor our fallen leaders from former presidents to the state governors, but there is no provision for the men and women who die preserving our way of life.

I can understand not lowering flags across the country for the death of a single servicemember. But shouldn't the servicemember's state lower the flag to show their respect to the fallen trooper, if only for one day? Some states do, but not all of them.

At the very minimum, the servicemember's forward operating base and the installation of his or her parent unit should show their respect by lowering the flag for one day.

We line the sides of Disney Drive here when one of our brothers or sisters in the service dies, but we don't lower the flag they fight under. A person can argue that we have Memorial Day for this but tell that to the people who knew the person.

We walk down Disney Drive everyday and salute the ranks above us, and those above us salute back. This is a sign of respect.

The U.S. flag is more than a piece of cloth. It is a symbol, a symbol which represents the people of America.

Hundreds of thousands of men and women have died under our flag, preserving its people.

When we honor the flag by saluting it, we are honoring what it stands for. We honor freedom, the people it represents and a way of life.

Isn't it time our flag saluted back when a person makes the ultimate sacrifice? Shouldn't the flag, which represents our society, tip its hat when someone dies to ensure it will fly another day?

If the flags on our FOBs were lowered for just one day after the death of a servicemember, it would show the people who knew the person that society cared, the American people care.

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Contact Information – CJTF-82 Public Affairs Office Tel – 0093-799-063-013

DSN: 318-231-7852

bagrammediacenter@afghan.swa.army.mil

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