

70. INDEPENDENCE DAY

Everybody loves the Fourth of July. In many communities it's a time for parades, fireworks, ball games and picnics.

Real fun! But we ought not to forget what the Fourth of July really is - the birthday of our country - because that's when the Declaration of Independence was adopted in 1776, over 200 years ago. Here's a trick question for you. How many stars were in the US flag on the first Fourth of July? You're probably going to say 13, because there were 13 colonies in America then, but that's wrong.

In fact, there weren't any stars in the flag. The colonists were using the Grand Union Flag, which used the British union symbol and 13 red and white stripes. You can see a picture of it in your Official Boy Scout Handbook. Stars representing the states first appeared in the US flag 11 years later. Since then, stars have been added each time states have joined the union.

Today we honor this emblem of our country with its 50 stars and 13 stripes because it is the symbol of the nation's unity. We use flag ceremonies so often that it's easy to forget what the flag means and what the Fourth of July means in this country's history.

Now I'm going to ask our honor patrol to retire the colors. As they do it, let's think about the brave men who signed the Declaration of Independence and the love of country they passed on to us.