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American Legion Bert Hodge Post 45 members saluted retiring American flags Monday as flames consumed the red, white and blue fabric.

Post members conducted a flag retirement ceremony Monday in honor of Flag Day, established to celebrate Old Glory and its June 14, 1777, adoption.

“To me, this flag is a symbol of what we all fought for, what the American military fought for and died for, and they should be retired properly,” said Lester Sheppard. Sheppard stepped in as post commander during the ceremony because current Commander Ken Moore could not attend the observance.

The Dignified Disposal of Unserviceable Flags took place in front of the Palatka post where members and onlookers watched a detailed tradition unfold. Five Legion members took part in presenting the flags. They had to be inspected by each of the five before proceeding.

“These flags have become faded and worn over the graves of our departed comrades and the dead soldiers, sailors and airmen of all our nation’s wars,” Sergeant-at-Arms Gary Coward said during the ceremony.

Chaplain Larry Blair prayed, thanking God for the country, the American flag and the liberty Old Glory represents.

“To a clean and purging flame we commit these flags, worn out in worthy service. As they yield their substance to the fire, may your Holy

Light spread over us and bring our hearts renewed devotion to God and our country,” Blair said.

As the final words were spoken, members lit a fire outside the post. They laid one flag on the flames and watched it burn for a few moments before gathering four more to be properly disposed.

Smoke rose in the air, veterans saluted the Stars and Stripes and the fabric turned to ash.

Sheppard said the retirement ceremony is not one of protest and does not desecrate the flag.

“We do it with respect,” he said.

He said anyone can properly retire of a flag as long as it is done with dignity and honor. But the Palatka post tries to retire flags at least three times per year. Residents can drop off worn flags in the post office box near the Legion’s door, 316 Osceola St., and they will be appropriately disposed.

“These flags, they have been flown for our country, in honor of country and our dead and our fallen. And, to me, I hate to see someone throw a flag down,” Sheppard said. “We never let the flags touch the ground and it’s an honor to us to be able to come out here and show the people that when they bring flags to be retired that they are retired properly.”

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