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Henrico Medal of Honor recipient, 90, ordered to remove flagpole



Stars and stripes

Col. Van T. Barfoot, the 90-year-old Medal of Honor recipient who refuses to remove his flagpole from his property, speaks out on what the flag means to him.

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Medal of Honor recipient Col. Van T. Barfoot is being ordered to remove a flagpole from his yard in western Henrico County.

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By [Staff Reports](#)

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Col. Van T. Barfoot, a local Medal of Honor recipient, is under the gun from his Henrico County community's homeowner association.

In a five-paragraph letter to Barfoot that he received yesterday, Barfoot is being ordered to remove a flagpole from his yard. The decorated veteran of three wars, now 90 years old, raises the American flag every morning on the pole, then lowers and folds the flag at dusk each day in a three-corner military fashion.

In a priority mail letter, the Coates & Davenport law firm in Richmond is ordering Barfoot to remove the pole by 5 p.m. Friday or face "legal action being brought to enforce the Covenants and Restrictions against you." The letter states that Barfoot will be subject to paying all legal fees and costs in any successful legal proceeding pursued by the homeowner association's board.

Barfoot's daughter said this evening that news reports about the association order have prompted an outpouring of sympathy and offers of help from people following her father's ordeal.

Tonight, the Sussex Square Homeowners Association issued a statement reiterating its position that Barfoot directly violated the association board's denial of his request to erect a flagpole.

"This is not about the American flag. This about a flagpole," the statement reads.

Barfoot lives in the Sussex Square community in far western Henrico; its board of directors rejected a plea from Barfoot in July to approve the pole, disallowing the fixture on aesthetic grounds.

There is no provision in the community's rules expressly forbidding flagpoles, Barfoot's daughter said. But she said the board ruled against her father's fixture and ordered it removed in July, deciding that free-standing flag poles are not aesthetically appropriate. Short flag stands attached to porches dot the community.

"Dad sort of feels like this is the end," said Margaret Nicholls, Barfoot's daughter, who lives a few doors away. But she said this morning that she and her husband are attempting to generate support for her father's cause, a flag-raising rite that he has undertaken for most of his life.

Barfoot received the Medal of Honor on the battlefield during World War II in Italy and fought as well in the Korean and Vietnam wars. A portion of a highway in rural Mississippi, his native state, was named in his honor this fall. A building at McGuire Veterans Hospital in Richmond also carries his name.

Barfoot began regularly flying the flag on Veteran's Day this year despite the Sussex Square board's decision.

He said in November that not flying the flag would be a sacrilege to him.

"There's never been a day in my life or a place I've lived in my life that you couldn't fly the American flag," he said.

For more on this story, see tomorrow's Richmond Times-Dispatch.

-- Bill McKelway

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[Flag Comment](#) Posted by mikeyt on December 04, 2009 at 6:18 pm

RamblinMan... I wouldn't ram a flagpole up your rectum because I probably couldn't figure out how to fly a flag off of it.

But the fact remains that we're talking about this man's private property—he does not rent. The Constitution he won America's highest honor defending gives him the right to put that flagpole up. The man's extraordinary actions and bravery in the face of the enemy has earned him the right to put that flagpole wherever he likes—including up your rectum if he chooses. Screw the HOA and their ridiculous, overzealous, powermongering, control freak rules.

[Flag Comment](#) Posted by Cpl JT Davis on December 04, 2009 at 5:53 pm

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of life above and beyond the call of duty on 23 May 1944, near Carano, Italy. With his platoon heavily engaged during an assault against forces well entrenched on commanding ground, 2d Lt. Barfoot (then Tech. Sgt.) moved off alone upon the enemy left flank. He crawled to the proximity of 1 machinegun nest and made a direct hit on it with a hand grenade, killing 2 and wounding 3 Germans. He continued along the German defense line to another machinegun emplacement, and with his tommygun killed 2 and captured 3 soldiers. Members of another enemy machinegun crew then abandoned their position and gave themselves up to Sgt. Barfoot. Leaving the prisoners for his support squad to pick up, he proceeded to mop up positions in the immediate area,

capturing more prisoners and bringing his total count to 17. Later that day, after he had reorganized his men and consolidated the newly captured ground, the enemy launched a fierce armored counterattack directly at his platoon positions. Securing a bazooka, Sgt. Barfoot took up an exposed position directly in front of 3 advancing Mark VI tanks. From a distance of 75 yards his first shot destroyed the track of the leading tank, effectively disabling it, while the other 2 changed direction toward the flank. As the crew of the disabled tank dismounted, Sgt. Barfoot killed 3 of them with his tommygun. He continued onward into enemy terrain and destroyed a recently abandoned German fieldpiece with a demolition charge placed in the breech. While returning to his platoon position, Sgt. Barfoot, though greatly fatigued by his Herculean efforts, assisted 2 of his seriously wounded men 1,700 yards to a position of safety. Sgt. Barfoot's extraordinary heroism, demonstration of magnificent valor, and aggressive determination in the face of pointblank fire are a perpetual inspiration to his fellow soldiers.

This man has earned the right to put a flag anywhere he wants to include the place he calls home as he has earned that land more than any.

Thank you for your service Colonel!!

Flag Comment Posted by RamblinMan on December 04, 2009 at 2:03 pm

I'm one of those who believe that the guy is a hero but should abide by the same rules as everyone else that accepted the HOA agreement....that means a ruling about a pole even if you don't like that ruling. You don't hear their decision and then say, "I'm going to put up this pole anyway."

But, all of the intellectuals here have made me change my mind with their great persuasive arguments, like calling me and others like me un-American, disgusting, stupid, disrespectful, disgraceful, socialist, telling us to move to Cuba, and offering to ram a pole up our rectum sideways.

And you say WE are the ones who are not being civil?

Flag Comment Posted by SASelf on December 04, 2009 at 1:52 pm

All the wisdom of people has been written out by laws and rules.

Remember in Mary Poppins (yes the movie) The Admiral Boom that lived at the end of the block and shot the cannon everyday at a schedule time. I know a strange thing to bring up, but where is our tolerance for ourselves, mostly when we are asked to be so tolerant of everyone else.

The military isn't a job. You can't walk out or just quit. You can't tell off your boss, or just not do what you were told to do. Oh and also slacking is punishable instantly, not verbal warnings and write ups. The pay is livable, but you will not ever be beyond middle class. You are always on call at any given moment and you join knowing you will have to defend your country, with your life if need be.

The respect of a veteran, whether one of war and/or 20 years + served, has withered in the last 20 or so years. With the Great men (leaders) Ike, Bob Hope and many others, where are the men of great character and have a voice that just stand up and cry foul

? Would this have even happened when President Reagan was in office? It would not have. Keep the pole up and the Flag flying, to do otherwise would be more than wrong. It would be a defeat to all those that have died for it.

Flag Comment Posted by KCRABS on December 04, 2009 at 11:44 am

For gosh sakes the man is 90 years old...let him have his flag and pole! Anyone who has done what he has done for our country and is still able to raise and lower our flag, let the man do it and move on with it. I hope to God that I live that old and will be able to do the things this man can do. Obviously God is on his side!

Flag Comment Posted by FistFwd on December 04, 2009 at 11:42 am

This man served our country in 3 wars. One of which many Americans tried to avoid military service or protested. This man served voluntarily with an assumed risk of being put in harms way. The very freedom that this Association has was/is protected by this man and our military men and women who have served or are now serving regardless of war or not. Something many people forgot. Today as many of our troops volunteer for military service we hail them as heroes, wear or post yellow ribbons, fly American and other military flags, display magnets on our vehicles to show our support for troops. For all of his adult life the Flag has been a meaningful event. This is an issue that should never be questioned. An Association does not have the authority to take away a persons inalienable right to express themselves. If they are so worried about the aesthetics then someone please tell me what is so unappealing to the eye about the American Flag? I have volunteered for military service (Army) in 1986 and served until 1990. No one really understands what the meaning of our Flag is unless you wore a uniform or have a loved one who answered the call of duty. It takes a special person answer that call. especially today when you know you will be put in harms way upon completion of training. To say it is not about the Flag but about the pole is ridiculous. The American Flag is meant to be flown high and proud and for all to see on a pole. I'm sure when the Colonel sees the flag it reminds him of the men and women who have lost their lives in battle. What does it mean to you? I hope it means more than some symbol used at sporting events. Think about everytime the National Anthem is played and look in stands as all the people start yelling and cheering before the Anthem is completed. The National Anthem in case you forgot is about our Flag.

Flag Comment Posted by expatvet on December 04, 2009 at 11:28 am

Aesthetics be damned! That is a very ambiguous, subjective, loosely defined, or call-it-what-you-want term for somebody's opinion that cannot be defended in any reasonable debate. Colonel Barfoot has every right in the world to ignore those self-serving small minded cretins that are delusional enough to believe their concept of "proper aesthetics" uphold the neighborhood values in the best way. They have already done more to devalue their community than they will ever be able to figure out, based on their incredibly poor handling of this matter. God bless Colonel Barfoot! His HOA deserves nothing less than a swift - and continuous - kick in the *** until they are all replaced by owners that demonstrate the common sense and intelligence that is clearly not present in the current HOA leadership. His flagpole preference is a right - call it a special entitlement if you wish - that he earned decades ago, fully supported by all but the marginalized extreme left wing liberals - and no HOA has enough power to deny or take away that right.

As a veteran myself (former Naval Aviator) I would go on the offensive to make sure this sort of situation would not happen anywhere I happened to call home, and stand ready to support one of our country's most cherished and honored citizens if Colonel Barfoot needs any more help than I'm sure he is already receiving.

Flag Comment Posted by kdm98 on December 04, 2009 at 9:52 am

I don't really understand why a flagpole is considered non-aesthetic. Is it because it points out a position of strong patriotism? Could it be that they don't want anyone clearly identifying ideological viewpoints in their yards?

Flag Comment Posted by amy89 on December 04, 2009 at 9:48 am

To all the people siding with the HOA.

Let me ask you this.

Have you ever broken a law (ex speeding) or gone against something others said you could not do because you did not feel it was right or did not agree with opposition? Ex. Your parents said you can't go out Friday but you sneak out after they go to sleep. Or Your employer said you can't wear such & such but you do it anyway? I can think of many more but I would hope you can think for yourself as well. Honestly until you can say you have never broken a law or agreement, shut the h@\$! up. Stop acting like you and the HOA s&%t don't stink. For real. Get over yourself. Have some respect. The man knew he went against him. Maybe he didn't give a rat's a&#. He has held the tradition of flying the flagpole for 36 years. Why should he stop because 9 people said he couldn't. I would of done the same. #%%&* them and their aesthetics. He is a hero. He has done more in his life that anyone of the HOA members combined.

Picking on a 90 year old vet. Pathetic and truly disgusting . I hope they feel awesome about themselves.

Flag Comment Posted by steelerfan on December 04, 2009 at 8:07 am

Thank you Colonel for your service and dedication to our country. The Sussex square board was able to sit on their butts and deny your patriotic request because of the sacrifice you and all of our veterans made. Please let me know where to send a check for your legal costs to fight this unjust and unpatriotic ruling. Semper Fi.

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