

# PARKING LOT PARADE

Junior Bryce Combs stands beside his truck in the parking lot. He was one of four students suspended for three days after they created a disruption in the parking lot. PHOTO BY NATE THOMPSON

Displaying the Confederate flag leads the suspension of four students  
+BY CADENCE ELDER AND ASHER NORBERG

It's 8 a.m., Thursday, March 9. Sitting in the driver's side of his 1995 Chevrolet Silverado, sophomore Tyler Thomas revs his engine.

"Does this sound loud to you guys?" he shouts.

Thomas and his friends occasionally gather in the parking lot before school to tailgate. This morning is special, though, because it's Thomas' and his friends' first day back from their three-day suspension.

"Me and Dylan [had the Confederate flags]," Thomas said. "Someone told me I couldn't fly it because it was illegal. I decided to test that theory. It was a spur of the moment thing. You will get suspended, but it's not illegal."

Thomas, along with sophomore Dylan Klahn and juniors Brandon Long and Bryce Combs, attached the Confederate flags to the back of his and Long's trucks and had then driven around the circle drive of the parking lot earlier in the week before school.

Teacher Christin LaMourie noticed the trucks driving through the circle drive. According to LaMourie, there were two trucks flying Confederate flags, and one flying an American flag as well.

"[The issue] wasn't that they had

Confederate flags, [it] was why were they parading with it," Lamourie said. "What were they trying to say or do? [The Confederate flag] could be interpreted as threatening to some people."

According to Long, the boys were not trying to make a statement.

"We were just bored and we were like 'Let's just fly the flag around,'" Long said.

The group of boys were suspended due to the disruption the flag caused. But, to Thomas, flying the Confederate flag had a deeper meaning.

"[The flag symbolizes] southern pride," Thomas said. "I understand why they think it stands for slavery, but I personally don't think it does. Robert E. Lee was a great leader, and that flag symbolizes him. We are just taking pride in our history and our great leaders."

Before the incident with the flags, Thomas and his friends had taken up two spots per vehicle in the back of the parking lot with their trucks. After receiving a number of complaints, the SROs issued a warning indicating that the trucks would be towed if they were not parked within the spaces designated in the lot. According to Thomas, their

parking was supposed to make a statement. They discussed parking that way until everyone stood for the Pledge [of Allegiance], but realized that was an ineffective way to create change.

"I don't look at the flag as representing the country. I see the people that fought for the country and died for it," Thomas said. "That is why it really pisses me off when people don't stand for the pledge. You can't stand for 30 seconds for the people who died for your country so you can live freely?"

Long also stated that they were approached by a small group of students who were upset by the Confederate flag. According to the Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, the 1st Amendment protects students' rights to freedom of speech, providing that speech doesn't cause a disruption. Student Resource Officer Sean Tompkins indicated Thomas, Long, Klahn and Combs created a disruption.

"Legally, other than maybe driving recklessly, there was nothing illegal whatsoever about having that symbol," Tompkins said. "That is a constitutionally-[protected] freedom of speech issue. [But] we are here to learn and not have political protests. A school environment is not about disruption."



Sophomore Tyler Thomas stands on top his truck as he poses with juniors Bryce Combs, Brandon Long and sophomore Dylan Klahn. PHOTO BY NATE THOMPSON

## Did you know? The Confederate flag, then and now

**1** What is commonly referred to as the "Confederate flag" in the United States is actually the Second Confederate Navy Jack and the Battle Flag of Northern Virginia.

**2** This flag never officially represented the Confederate States of America, which existed in the American South from 1861 to 1865.

**3** The flag is seen by some as a symbol of slavery and racism, while others see it as a symbol of Southern pride and heritage.

**4** According to a national CNN poll taken in 2015, 75 percent of African Americans and 25 percent of white Americans view the flag as a symbol of racism.