Military Funeral Protocol

1. The order of the ceremony is the sounding of “Taps,” the folding of the flag, and then the presentation of the flag to the family. If there is a firing party, the volleys are fired before the sounding of “Taps.” The detail leader is responsible for ensuring each step in the ceremony is executed properly, from the arrival of the funeral cortege to its departure.

2. The bugler and color guard should be placed at the gravesite so they are in view of the family, approximately 30-40 yards from the grave. The firing party should also be in view of the family, but 45-75 yards from the grave, positioned to fire over the grave.

3. The firing party may include three to eight rifle bearers, reflecting the American military custom of firing “three volleys of musketry” over the graves of fallen comrades.

4. The Military Honors detail should be positioned near where the hearse will stop. After the funeral procession has arrived, the funeral director will open the rear of the hearse and the pallbearers should move into position so they can move easily to the back of the hearse when needed.

5. When the family is ready to proceed, the funeral director will signal the pallbearers to withdraw the casket from the hearse and carry it to the grave. The bugler, firing party and color guard are already in their gravesite positions.

6. All detail participants (except for the pallbearers) will come to “Attention” and “Present Arms” as the casket is carried to the grave. All detail participants will “Order arms” after the casket has been placed on the lowering device. Pallbearers may be instructed to hold the flag over the casket, or move off as a group and stand in formation for the service.

7. During the committal or religious service, all the detail participants may go to “Parade Rest.”

8. When the committal or religious service is completed, the service representative and assistant will assume the clergy representative’s position at the head of the grave and all detail participants will come to the position of “Attention.” Then, the funeral director will ask the mourners to stand for the rendering of honors.

9. Once the mourners have risen, the detail leader and all elements will execute “Present Arms,” volleys will be fired, and “Taps” sounded. Upon completion of “Taps,” all will “Order Arms” and the funeral director will request the mourners to be seated.

10. Next the flag is folded. The two person military detail, the pallbearers, or a combination of the two can do this. Once the flag is folded, it MUST end up in the hands of the detail assistant, who will pass it to the detail leader.

11. The detail leader will present the flag to the next of kin. (The wording accompanying the presentation should be in accordance with each Military Service’s tradition of expressing the thanks of a grateful nation.)

12. Following the flag presentation, the detail leader will offer condolences to the remainder of the immediate family and other mourners seated in the front row. It is appropriate and encouraged for a representative of the Authorized Provider to offer condolences after the detail leader.

13. Once condolences have been offered, the detail leader and assistant will return to the cortege arrival point and await the departure of the cortege. The bugler, firing party and color guard are released when the detail leader departs the gravesite. They may choose to remain in place until the family departs, or can return quietly to their own vehicles.

Military Funeral Traditions

As with the military itself, our armed forces' final farewell to comrades is steeped in tradition and ceremony.

Prominent in a military funeral is the flag-draped casket. The blue field of the flag is placed at the head of the casket, over the left shoulder of the deceased. The custom began in the Napoleonic Wars of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when a flag was used to cover the dead as they were taken from the battlefield on a caisson.

One will notice, during a military funeral that the horses that pull the caisson which bears the body of the veteran are all saddled, but the horses on the left have riders, while the horses on the right do not. This custom evolved from the days when horse-drawn caissons were the primary means of moving artillery ammunition and cannon, and the riderless horses carried provisions.

The single riderless horse that follows the caisson with boots reversed in the stirrups is called the "caparisoned horse" in reference to its ornamental coverings, which have a detailed protocol all to themselves. By tradition in military funeral honors, a caparisoned horse follows the casket of an Army or Marine Corps officer who was a colonel or above, or the casket of a president, by virtue of having been the nation's military commander in chief.

The custom is believed to date back to the time of Genghis Khan, when a horse was sacrificed to serve the fallen warrior in the next world. The caparisoned horse later came to symbolize a warrior who would ride no more. Abraham Lincoln, who was killed in 1865, was the first U.S. president to be honored with a caparisoned horse at his funeral.

Graveside military honors include the firing of three volleys each by seven service members. This commonly is confused with an entirely separate honor, the 21-gun salute. But the number of individual gun firings in both honors evolved the same way.

The three volleys came from an old battlefield custom. The two warring sides would cease hostilities to clear their dead from the battlefield, and the firing of three volleys meant that the dead had been properly cared for and the side was ready to resume the battle.

The 21-gun salute traces its roots to the Anglo-Saxon empire, when seven guns constituted a recognized naval salute, as most naval vessels had seven guns. Because gunpowder in those days could be more easily stored on land than at sea, guns on land could fire three rounds for every one that could be fired by a ship at sea.

Later, as gunpowder and storage methods improved, salutes at sea also began using 21 guns. The United States at first used one round for each state, attaining the 21-gun salute by 1818. The nation reduced its salute to 21 guns in 1841, and formally adopted the 21-gun salute at the suggestion of the British in 1875.

A U.S. presidential death also involves other ceremonial gun salutes and military traditions. On the day after the death of the president, a former president or president-elect—unless this day falls on a Sunday or holiday, in which case the honor will rendered the following day — the commanders of Army installations with the necessary personnel and material traditionally order that one gun be fired every half hour, beginning at reveille and ending at retreat.

On the day of burial, a 21-minute gun salute traditionally is fired starting at noon at all military installations with the necessary personnel and material. Guns will be fired at one-minute intervals. Also on the day of burial, those installations will fire a 50-gun salute — one round for each state — at five-second intervals immediately following lowering of the flag.

The playing of "Ruffles and Flourishes" announces the arrival of a flag officer or other dignitary of honor. Drums play the ruffles, and bugles play the flourishes — one flourish for each star of the flag officer's rank or as appropriate for the honoree's position or title. Four flourishes is the highest honor.

When played for a president, "Ruffles and Flourishes" is followed by "Hail to the Chief," which is believed to have been written in England in 1810 or 1811 by James Sanderson for a play by Sir Walter Scott called "The Lady of the Lake." The play began to be performed in the United States in 1812, the song became popular, and it became a favorite of bands at festive events. It evolved to be used as a greeting for important visitors, and eventually for the president, though no record exists of when it was first put to that use.

By Rod Powers, an About.com Guide

http://usmilitary.about.com/od/jointservices/a/funeralhonors.htm
General Military Information (continued)

Symbolism in the Flag Folding Ceremony

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<td>For the Christian citizen, represents eternity and glorifies God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.</td>
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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_funeral

The History of Taps

Of all the military bugle calls, none is so easily recognized or more apt to render emotion than Taps. Up to the Civil War, the traditional call at day's end was a tune, borrowed from the French, called Lights Out. In July of 1862, in the aftermath of the bloody Seven Days battles, hard on the loss of 600 men and wounded himself, Union General Daniel Adams Butterfield called the brigade bugler to his tent. He thought "Lights Out" was too formal and he wished to honor his men. Oliver Wilcox Norton, the bugler, tells the story, "...showing me some notes on a staff written in pencil on the back of an envelope, (he) asked me to sound them on my bugle. I did this several times, playing the music as written. He changed it somewhat, lengthening some notes and shortening others, but retaining the melody as he first gave it to me. After getting it to his satisfaction, he directed me to sound that call for Taps thereafter in place of the regulation call. The music was beautiful on that still summer night and was heard far beyond the limits of our Brigade. The next day I was visited by several buglers from neighboring Brigades, asking for copies of the music which I gladly furnished. The call was gradually taken up through the Army of the Potomac."

This more emotive and powerful Taps was soon adopted throughout the military. In 1874 It was officially recognized by the U.S. Army. It became standard at military funeral ceremonies in 1891. There is something singularly beautiful and appropriate in the music of this wonderful call. Its strains are melancholy, yet full of rest and peace. Its echoes linger in the heart long after its tones have ceased to vibrate in the air.

- Master Sergeant Jari A Villanueva, USAF
Marine Corps Funeral
Section 578 of the National Defense Act requires the U.S. Marine Corps to provide military funeral honors to eligible veterans. Funeral honors include the draping of the flag, the presentation of the flag, the playing of taps and, in some cases, a 21-gun salute. At least one Marine will be in attendance regardless of whether the funeral is performed at a private or a military cemetery. The family must request those honors by contacting the closest Marine base.

If the deceased was an active member of the Marine Corps or a member of the Marine Corps of Reserves, who either died while in the Corps or who was not dishonorably discharged, she is eligible for funeral honors.

The USMC provides a U.S. flag for marines who die while on active duty; the Department of Defense provides the flags for other funerals. Regardless of which entity provides the flag, it is free of charge and is draped over the casket during religious services and services performed at the interment site. At the close of the services, he attendant Marine folds the flag and presents it to the closest relative.

The presentation of the flag to the surviving relative acknowledges not only the sacrifices made by the deceased soldier, but also those of his family members. Taps is played at every military funeral. Buglers have become difficult to come by, however, so the Marine Corps often must resort to a prerecorded version.

A 21-gun salute is not a part of standard military funeral honors. For soldiers killed in the line of duty, however, a full honor guard fires a 21-gun salute at the funeral.

Flag Presentation Protocol:

A United States flag drapes the casket of deceased Service members and Veterans to honor their service to America. The flag is placed so that the blue field with stars is at the head and over the left shoulder of the deceased. After Taps has been played, the flag is carefully folded into the symbolic tri-cornered shape. A properly proportioned flag will fold 13 times on the triangles, representing the 13 original colonies. The folded flag is emblematic of the tri-cornered hat worn by the Patriots of the American Revolution. When folded, no red or white stripe is to be evident, leaving only the blue field with stars. The folded flag is then presented as a keepsake to the next of kin or an appropriate family member. Each branch of the Armed Forces uses its own wording for the presentation:

On behalf of the President of the United States, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and a grateful nation, please accept this flag as a symbol of our appreciation for your loved one's service to Country and Corps.

If the next of kin has expressed a religious preference or belief, add ... God bless you and this family, and God bless the United States of America.

United States Flag Manual, a publication distributed by the Military Salute Project.