

Military and Veteran Funerals

Since the American Legion and VFW in Moorhead perform honor guards for funerals, I decided to see what is done. A military funeral in the US is a memorial or burial rite given for a soldier, marine, sailor, coast guardsman or airman who died in battle or a Veteran or other prominent military figures or a president. Based Public Law 106-65, the military is mandated to provide the rendering of honors in a military funeral for any eligible Veteran if requested by his or her family. However, the Legion and VFW perform most of the honors for local Veteran's funerals. Standard honors include a US flag draping the casket, honor guards serving as a casket team, a three volley rifle salute, the playing of taps and the folded flag presented to the next of kin with this statement "On behalf of the President of the United States, the United States (Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force or Coast Guard), and a grateful nation, please accept this flag as a symbol of our appreciation for your loved one's honorable and faithful service." In recent years, echo taps have been played with one near the casket and one in a distance. Done well, it can cause shivers up and down the spine.

Military burial eligibility depends on several key factors related to the service member's participation in the armed forces. All servicemen and women who served on active duty or in the Selected Reserve are eligible to receive military burial benefits. In order to be considered an eligible veteran who served on active duty, a service member must have successfully completed a tour of duty, and departed under conditions other than dishonorable. A DD214 is required to establish eligibility. If this is not available, any other documentation representing an honorable discharge may be accepted.

If the Veteran's remains were cremated, the folded flag is presented to the next of kin at the end of the ceremony.

The custom of draping the casket with the US Flag may have started during the Napoleonic wars where flags were used so each side could identify their own dead.

The 21-gun salute – seven guns shot three times – came from a signal to stop fighting to allow each side to clear the dead from the field of battle. Once each army had cleared its dead, it would fire three volleys to indicate that the dead had been cared for and that they were ready to go back to fighting. The US Government adopted the 21-gun salute for funerals in 1875.

Taps was composed during the Civil War in 1862. In 1891 the Army required taps to be play at military funeral ceremonies.

The Flag folding ceremony requires 13 individual folding movements to create the blue field/white star triangle encasing the US flag.