



Funeral Honors Ceremony

“Honoring Those Who Serve”

The American Legion assisting as an “Authorized Provider”

In the *National Defense Authorization Act* for fiscal year 2000, the United States Congress legislated that, upon request of the next of kin, all eligible veterans **MUST** receive Military Funeral Honors when they pass on.

At a minimum, the funeral honors will consist of a two-person uniformed military detail, with at least one member representing the parent service of the deceased.

The legislation also encourages veterans’ service organizations, and others, to augment the honors detail as an authorized provider with pallbearers, firing party, bugler and color guard.

The American Legion has performed thousands of burial ceremonies annually for the families of veterans throughout their history; this will not change. Over the years the organization has adopted certain ways and means that may differ from other groups. This does not mean they are wrong or improper, just different.

Whenever The American Legion is assisting the United States Government they should conform to the DOD’s methods of conduct. In working together, we honor, in the highest traditions of American military service, those who have gone before. In doing so, all the requirements for a reverent, respectful, and dignified ceremony are met.

The individual military services will provide training to an authorized provider assisting with the ceremony to include positioning, timing, safety, and proper funeral honors protocol.

The following represents DOD guidance on the rendering of Military Funeral Honors. By law, the Military Funeral Honors detail will consist of at least two uniformed members of the military, with the detail leader from the parent service of the deceased. When requested by the next of kin, the ceremonial paying of respect and gratitude to those who have faithfully defended our Nation **MUST** include the following:

- ◆ **The sounding of “Taps” and ceremonial folding and presentation of the American flag.**
(The flag is always presented by the detail leader.)

The detail leader will coordinate all arrangements with the funeral director, other member(s) of the military honors detail, and with Authorized Providers, such as The American Legion. He or she will ensure the funeral director explains military honors to the family, and that they understand the honors to be performed. It is especially important the family know about the firing of three volleys, if a firing party is present. Additional Military Funeral Honors elements should be in accordance with the family’s wishes.

Once the detail leader has completed initial coordination, his or her final pre-interment responsibility is to train and rehearse the detail.

It is important for all involved to remember the detail leader bears the responsibility for all aspects of the Military Funeral Honors Ceremony, whether active duty service members or Authorized Providers perform those elements of the honors.

Positioning/Timing 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 riflebearers, 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.

It is the sacred obligation of all Americans to honor our deceased veterans by performing these time-honored duties in the best tradition of the decedent's Service. America's veterans like The American Legion are helping to fulfill that obligation by supplementing the effort of the Military Services.

Authorized Providers may receive reimbursement for certain expenses incurred in the rendering of Military funeral Honors. The assigned military unit can assist in obtaining the reimbursement. Upon completion of the ceremony, the detail leader MUST ensure the required information on the *Military Funeral Honors Data Collection Form* is completed and submitted to the tasked organization.

As an authorized provider of military funeral honors, The American Legion is the Nation's representative for this most hallowed event. The Legion's dignified participation reflects the professionalism of our own service to the Nation, and leaves a lasting impression on everyone present – a source of pride and support for the veteran's family, the friends and a grateful nation.

The above are the guidelines to follow if The American Legion is assisting as an Authorized Provider.

If The American Legion is conducting the ceremony without the presence of a military detail, established Legion protocol and tradition may be followed in rendering honors to a veteran who served in the Armed Forces of the United States of America.