

Military Funeral Honors and Customs

United States Veterans are given honorable, military funerals to commemorate the time they spent while serving our country. Family and friends are comforted in the traditions and respectful services created in honor of their loved one. Serving our country in the military is incredibly honorable. So, with respect to the fallen soldiers who have made this sacrifice, we salute them with tradition, respect and honor in the way of Military Honors.

Military funerals can take place at private cemeteries and national cemeteries dedicated to fallen soldiers across the country. There are 128 national cemeteries and 33 soldier's lots through out our nation alone. Religious traditions are often tied into the service to honor both the deceased's religion and military duty.

Draping the Casket with the National Flag

The tradition of draping the American Flag over the casket of a fallen soldier began during the Napoleonic War between 1796 and 1815. The deceased were carried off the battlefield covered in flags to honor their sacrifice. This practice continues to this day, but instead of several small flags, a large American Flag is draped over the top of the casket.

A United States flag is provided, at no cost, to drape the casket or accompany the urn of a deceased Veteran who served honorably in the U. S. Armed Forces.

- The flag is not placed in the grave and is not allowed to touch the ground.
- The flag is folded and given to the next of kin.
- The flag is carefully folded 13 times, each fold holding its own meaning.

What each fold represents

As the honor guard makes the folds (traditionally representing the 13 original colonies) and recites the meaning behind each fold.

1. **The first fold** is to symbolize life.
2. **The second fold** is a symbol of eternal life.
3. **The third fold** is to honor and remember the Veteran and the portion of their life that was given in the defense of our country to attain peace in the world.
4. **The fourth fold** symbolizes our weaker nature compared to God, symbolizing our trust in Him for peace and divine guidance in times of war.
5. **The fifth fold** is a tribute to our country, for in the words of Stephen Decatur: "Our country, in dealing with other countries, may she always be right; but it still be our country right or wrong".
6. **The sixth fold** is for where our hearts lie. It is with our heart that we pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.
7. **The seventh fold** is a tribute to our armed forces, for it is through the armed forces that we protect our country and our flag against all her enemies, whether they be found within or without the boundaries of our republic.
8. **The eighth fold** is in honor to those who entered into the Valley of the Shadow of Death, that we might see the light of day.
9. **The ninth fold** is a tribute to womanhood. For it has been through their faith, love, loyalty and devotion, the character of the men and women who have made this country great molded. The flag also honors the mother, for whom it flies on Mother's Day.
10. **The tenth fold** is tribute to our father. He too has given his sons and daughters for the defense of our country since they were first-born.
11. **The eleventh fold** in the eyes of a Hebrew citizen, represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon and glorifies the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
12. **The twelfth fold** in the eyes of a Christian citizen, represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies the Holy Trinity.
13. **The thirteenth fold**, when the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost reminding is of our national motto "In God We Trust".

Firing three rifle volleys

The practice originated during the Colonial period on the battle field when the fighting would halt and the dead would be removed from the battle field. Once the field was clear, each army would fire three volleys to ensure that the dead had been cared for and they were ready to continue the fight.

- Every honorably discharged veteran is entitled to a traditional three volley salute.
- A firing party of seven will fire three rifle volleys simultaneously over the grave.



The playing of Taps

The music for Taps was adapted by Union General Daniel Butterfield in 1862. In 1874 Taps was officially adopted by the US Army. It is customary at a Military Funeral to have a bugler or electronic playing of Taps in honor of the departed soldier.

Benefits offered to the deceased and family

The Department of Veterans Affairs supplies a headstone for both the deceased and their spouse at no charge. Families of the deceased also receive a certificate from the President of the United States, known as the Presidential Memorial Certificate.