

A stylized graphic of the American flag, featuring a blue field with white stars and red and white stripes, positioned on the left side of the image.

**ELEMENTS OF MILITARY  
FUNERALS AT ARLINGTON  
NATIONAL CEMETERY**

A small red five-pointed star located above the title text.A small red five-pointed star located below the title text.



# ELEMENTS OF MILITARY FUNERALS



*Members of the U.S. Air Force Honor Guard, the U.S. Air Force Band Ceremonial Brass, and the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) Caisson Platoon conduct military funeral honors with funeral escort. (Arlington National Cemetery/Elizabeth Fraser, 2019)*

Arlington National Cemetery is an active cemetery, and during your visit you may encounter some elements of a military funeral. If this happens, please be respectful and do not interfere with or attempt to participate in any of the funeral honors or ceremony. Be mindful and respectful of the mourners attending funerals here.

Military funeral honors include ceremonial elements that convey gratitude and respect for the sacrifices of military service members and their families. The elements included in a funeral reflect the rank of the deceased.



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# ELEMENTS OF MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS

Enlisted service members of the rank WO-1 (Warrant Officer-1) through CW-3 (Chief Warrant Officer-3) and commissioned officers of the rank O-1 through O-3 who are eligible for interment at Arlington National Cemetery will receive military funeral honors.

The elements of military funeral honors include:

A small red five-pointed star located below the text.



*A casket team composed of Marines from the Washington, D.C. Marine Barracks. (Arlington National Cemetery/Elizabeth Fraser, 2019)*

## Casket Team

The casket team, also known as body bearers or pallbearers, will be members of the decedent's service branch. If the funeral is for a president of the United States, secretary of defense, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff or an officer granted multiple-service command, the casket team will include members of all service branches.





*Members of the U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard firing party fire a three-volley salute. (Arlington National Cemetery/Elizabeth Fraser, 2019)*

## Firing Party

On European battlefields in the 17th and 18th centuries, fighting would periodically cease so each side could remove their dead and wounded from the battlefield. Once the dead had been properly cared for, three shots would be fired into the air, signifying that the battle could resume. That tradition transformed into the three-volley salute, in which a rifle team fires three rounds of blanks into the air during a military funeral.

The three-volley salute should not be confused with a 21-gun salute, which uses artillery guns and is reserved for the president of the United States and for special occasions.

While visiting Arlington National Cemetery, be aware that you may hear gunfire or artillery fire as part of these ceremonial salutes. Though the firing parties use blanks, the shots can be quite loud. For your personal safety and out of respect for mourners attending funeral services, please do not seek to follow the sound of a firing party.





*A bugler from the U.S. Navy Band plays Taps during a funeral service. (Arlington National Cemetery/Elizabeth Fraser, 2017)*

## Bugler

Bugle calls were traditionally used in the military to announce different events – the time to wake up, time to eat, time to charge on the battlefield, etc. The bugle call “Taps” was written in 1862, during the Civil War, to indicate “lights out.”

A few months after Taps was written, a captain in the Union Army ordered that it be played at a soldier’s funeral, since he was worried that the usual three volley salute would restart the battle. Others copied the practice, and by 1891 Taps was officially incorporated into the regulations for U.S. Army funerals.

If you hear a bugler playing Taps during your visit to Arlington National Cemetery, show respect by turning to face the sound and either placing your hand over your heart (if you are a civilian) or saluting (if you are a member of the military).





*A member of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) holds a folded flag for presentation. (Arlington National Cemetery/Elizabeth Fraser, 2017)*

## **Folding and Presentation of the U.S. Flag**

Prior to a military funeral, members of the casket team drape an American flag over the casket. This flag remains in place while the casket is transported to the gravesite and throughout the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, the casket team folds the flag and presents it to the decedent's closest living relative, or next of kin. The flag is always folded into a triangle, with the stars on the outside.





# ELEMENTS OF MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS WITH FUNERAL ESCORT

Service members who attained the grade of E-9, CW-4 and CW-5 and O-4 and above, or service members regardless of rank who receive the Medal of Honor or who are killed in action, may receive military funeral honors with funeral escort.

This includes:





*Members of the “The President’s Own” Marine Band and Marines from the Washington, D.C. Marine Barracks conduct military funeral honors with funeral escort. (Arlington National Cemetery/Elizabeth Fraser, 2017)*

## Marching Element and Military Band

The “funeral escort” includes a marching element from the service member’s service branch (the size of this group depends on the rank of the deceased) and a military band that plays during the procession to the gravesite.





*Members of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) Caisson Platoon and Marines from the Washington, D.C. Marine Barracks help conduct military funeral honors with funeral escort. (Arlington National Cemetery/Elizabeth Fraser, 2019)*

## Caisson

The families of those eligible for a funeral escort at Arlington National Cemetery may request a horse-drawn caisson to carry the casket to the gravesite. Caissons were originally used to transport artillery ammunition and evoke a connection to military tradition and history. At Arlington National Cemetery, the caisson teams are made up of seven gray or black horses and four riders from the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard), stationed at nearby Fort Myer.





*A member of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) Caisson Platoon leads a caparisoned horse.  
(Arlington National Cemetery/Elizabeth Fraser, 2019)*

## Caparisoned (Riderless) Horse

If the deceased was an Army or Marine Corps officer with the rank of colonel or above, the family may request a caparisoned horse. This is a riderless horse, led behind the caisson, with a pair of boots placed backwards in the stirrups to represent a commander looking back on his or her troops a final time.





*Members of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard) Presidential Salute Battery fire blanks as part of a drill. (Arlington National Cemetery/Elizabeth Fraser, 2018)*

## Artillery Gun Salute

Army general officers may receive a battery cannon salute, and general officers and flag officers of the Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy may receive minute gun salutes. The number of rounds fired depends on the rank of the deceased. The 21-gun salute is reserved for the president of the United States and for special occasions.





*Members from all five branches of the U.S. Armed Forces participate in a joint full military honors funeral service. (Arlington National Cemetery/Elizabeth Fraser, 2018)*

## Armed Forces Funeral Honors

Armed forces funeral honors are the same as military funeral honors with funeral escort, with the exception that escort platoons from each of the military services participate. These funerals are reserved for the president of the United States (as commander-in-chief), the secretary of defense, the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and officers granted multiple-service command.





*A U.S. Air Force Honor Guard casket team carries the casket of a military spouse. (Arlington National Cemetery/Rachel Larue, 2015)*

## Spouse and Dependent Honors

When a spouse or other eligible dependent of a current or former member of the armed forces is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, the military service in which the member served will provide a casket team or body bearer and a military chaplain, if requested. No other military funeral honors will be rendered unless the spouse also served in the military.





*An Army Arlington Lady speaks with a mourner. (Arlington National Cemetery/Rachel Larue, 2016)*

## Arlington Ladies

The Arlington Ladies are a unique part of the military funerals held at Arlington National Cemetery. In 1948, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Hoyt Vandenberg, and his wife Gladys regularly attended funerals at ANC, and they noticed that some service members were buried with few mourners present. To ensure that no service member would be buried alone, Gladys organized a group of Air Force Officers' wives to attend every Air Force funeral held at the cemetery.

Wives in the Army, Navy and Coast Guard soon followed suit, and the Arlington Ladies have become an official part of the funeral service. After the flag is presented to the next of kin, one of the Arlington Ladies will present a card of condolence on behalf the military service branch's chief of staff and herself.

At this time, the Marine Corps does not have an Arlington Ladies group, but there is a representative of the commandant of the Marine Corps at each funeral.





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## Images:

**Page 2:** Fraser, Elizabeth. Military Funeral Honors with Funeral Escort for U.S. Air Force Maj. Gen. Marcelite Harris in Section 30. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, February 7, 2019. <https://flic.kr/p/243pfGT>

**Page 4:** Fraser, Elizabeth. Military Funeral Honors With Funeral Escort are Conducted for U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Pvt. Ted Hall in Section 57. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, October 18, 2019. <https://flic.kr/p/2hwTJqD>

**Page 5:** Fraser, Elizabeth. Military Funeral Honors for U.S. Navy Reserve Pharmacist's Mate Third Class William Blancheri in Section 60. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, June 3, 2019. <https://flic.kr/p/2g8egPq>

**Page 6:** Fraser, Elizabeth. Funeral for U.S. Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Xavier A. Martin at Arlington National Cemetery. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, August 9, 2017. <https://flic.kr/p/WhQA91>

**Page 7:** Fraser, Elizabeth. U.S. Army Sgt. Willie Rowe Korea Repatriation at Arlington National Cemetery. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, August 8, 2017. <https://flic.kr/p/WZ6uM5>

**Page 9:** Fraser, Elizabeth. Funeral for Marine Corps Reserve 1st Lt. William Ryan. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, May 10, 2017. <https://flic.kr/p/UCbsF9>

**Page 10:** Fraser, Elizabeth. Military Funeral Honors with Funeral Escort were Conducted for U.S. Marine Corps Pvt. Edwin Benson. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, November 19, 2019. <https://flic.kr/p/2hNmMNP>

**Page 11:** Fraser, Elizabeth. Military Funeral Honors with Funeral Escort are Conducted for U.S. Marine Corps Col. Jaime Sabater. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, November 6, 2019. <https://flic.kr/p/2hGXftW>

**Page 12:** Fraser, Elizabeth. Presidential Salute Battery Practice. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, August 7, 2018. <https://flic.kr/p/29PJSLs>

**Page 13:** Fraser, Elizabeth. Joint Full Military Honors Funeral Service of Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Frank C. Carlucci in Section 48. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, June 26, 2018. <https://flic.kr/p/27sMwr7>

**Page 14:** Larue, Rachel. Graveside service of Maureen Fitzsimons Blair, also known as Maureen O'Hara, in Arlington National Cemetery. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, November 9, 2015. <https://flic.kr/p/AfZVKc>

**Page 15:** Larue, Rachel. Graveside service for U.S. Army Sgt. Wilson Meckley Jr. in Arlington National Cemetery. Photograph. Arlington, Virginia: Arlington National Cemetery, April 4, 2016. <https://flic.kr/p/FQqevm>

