

Conducting Your Flag Ceremony



Introduction

Congratulations on being asked to present the colors at your Unit's ceremony!

The following steps will help you get ready to do a ceremony in accordance with the United States Flag Code.

Since federal law governs the display of our national flag, this insures that it will be treated with the respect it is due.

Conducting Your Flag Ceremony

Be Prepared!

Find out where and when the ceremony will take place. Visit the location to see what problems might occur. If possible, take the Color Guard with you so they can also see the area.

Check the room height and width of the aisle the Color Guard must travel. Make sure the flagstaves will not hit a ceiling, overhead light, curtain or doorway along the way.

Make sure the flag is in respectable condition before you display it. A torn, tattered, badly faded or dirty flag should not be displayed.

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Carrying the Flag

If the ceiling is very low, the flags can be carried "In Trail." This means the flagstaff is held to the right side of the body with the butt of the staff just above the ground or floor. The left hand is placed at the bottom of the hoist -- where the lower edge of the flag meets the staff. The right hand holds both corners of the flag and is placed as low on the staff as the Color Guard can comfortably reach.

This should form a belly in the now "bloused" flag and should keep the flag from dragging. All flags should be carried in the same manner. The American flag is held the highest. Be sure the American flag is the highest (by a few inches) when placed in the flag base.



Posting & Retiring the Colors Procedure 3-Man Color Guard + 1 Caller

How to carry the flag:

The color guard forms up at the back of the room, or if outside in back of the audience, as close to the middle as possible. The caller positions himself behind the color guard as the color guard lines up. The American Flag is carried by the bearer in the front center of the formation. The other two flag bearers will be lined up shoulder to shoulder a few feet behind the American Flag bearer. The Tennessee Flag will be carried by the bearer on the left and the T.A.R.S. Flag will be carried by the bearer on the right.

Carry all of the flags completely vertical. Keep the flags vertical until the colors are presented. Your right hand should be as low as is comfortable on the flag staff. Your left hand reaches across your body and holds the staff on the lower corner of the flag where it attaches to the flag staff. Your left forearm should be level with the ground.

Requests and Commands:

The caller uses two different tones while advancing the color guard. One tone is for the color guard, using a strong, loud, and commanding tone. In this instruction when the caller commands, he uses the commanding tone. The other tone is used when addressing the audience, is a strong but non-commanding tone. In this instruction when the caller makes a “request,” he uses this non-commanding tone.

Posting the Colors:

When the event is ready for the presentation of colors, the caller commands, **“Color guard prepare to present colors!”**

The caller then requests the audience, **“Please rise.”**

The caller waits 5 seconds, then commands, **“Color guard, ATTENTION”**

The caller waits one second, then commands, **“Color guard, ADVANCE”**

The color guards all start by stepping forward with their left foot. Allow the American flag to take a slight lead.

When the color guard reaches the front of the room, the flag bearer carrying the U.S. Flag stops, makes a sharp left turn and proceeds to their position behind the flag base. The other two flag bearer's stop at the front of the room, make a sharp right turn and proceed single file to their position behind the flag bases.

When Honor Guard is in position behind the flag bases, the command is given to present colors. The U.S. Flag stays vertical; the other flags are tilted at 30 degrees. Flags are held in this manner until singing of National Anthem, Pledge to the American Flag, or both.

After the command to Present Colors, the caller politely requests the audience to, **"Please remove headgear, if appropriate, and then join in the Pledge of Allegiance."**

The caller, using the request tone, **begins the Pledge of Allegiance**, and after the first 3 words, drops the volume to a more normal volume. The color guards recite the pledge.

After the Pledge of Allegiance the command is given **"Prepare to post."** Other flags are returned to vertical and all flags are positioned over the flag holders. Command is given "Post colors." All flags are placed in holders at one time.

After a one second pause, the caller commands, **"Color guard, REGROUP!"**

The honor guard then turns toward the center aisle and retraces their steps to the center aisle. The guard that carried the U.S. Flag should reach the center aisle first, make a sharp turn and proceed down the aisle. The other honor guards are single file until they reach the center aisle. They then make a sharp turn and march shoulder to shoulder slightly behind the first guard. Once the color guard reaches the back of the room and pauses, the caller commands, **"Color Guard, Dismissed!"**

This is followed by the Invocation and/or the request for the audience of **"Thank you, you may be seated."**

Retiring the Colors

The color guard forms up in the back of the room. The caller positions himself behind the color guard. When ready to retire the colors, the caller commands, **"Color guard, prepare to retrieve the colors."** Request to audience,

“Please rise.” Command is given, **“Color guard advance!”** Color guard advances in same formation and manner as presenting color, until standing behind flag base holders, command is given to **“Prepare to retrieve colors.”**

Place left hand on flag staff at bottom of flag, right hand below this in a comfortable position, same as when posting colors. Command is given, **“Retrieve colors!”** All flags are taken out of flag bases at the same time; the command is given, **“Retire colors!”** Color guard carries flags out in the same manner as posting, with the American Flag in front, with sharp turns at front of aisle. After color guard has regrouped at back of room, command will be given, **“Color guard dismissed.”** Flags are to be properly taken care of and placed in containers. The American Flag is properly folded and placed in box last.

Posting the Colors- Caller’s Commands and Request

Color guard Prepare to Present Colors!

Please Rise. (to Audience)

Color Guard ADVANCE!

Color Guard Present Colors!

Join in the Pledge of Allegiance (to Audience)

Color Guard Prepare to post the Colors!

Post!

Color Guard Regroup!

Color Guard Dismissed!

Retiring the Colors- Callers Command & Request

Color Guard, Prepare to Retire Colors!

Please Rise (to Audience)

Color Guard Advance!

Color Guard Prepare to Retrieve Colors!

Retrieve the Colors!

Color Guard, Retire the Colors!

Color Guard, Dismissed!

Mourning Bands covering Badges/patches

Mourning bands are another symbol that the emergency services utilize to honor our fallen. Mourning bands should be worn according to the level of service that is to be provided. A period of thirty (30) days for a line-of-duty death, time of death till day of burial service for non-line of duty death, and during the services for a retired member is the standard that agencies should use.

Mourning bands should be made of ¾” black elastic material and sized to fit around the center portion of the badge. Some commercially made mourning bands have a thin blue line or thin red line in the center and can be easily purchased. Some organizations may not have badges and can either stitch or pin a ¾” piece of black material across their patch or wear a 2” black band around the upper left arm. Many times black electrical tape was used, however effective, it does not provide for a professional appearance and should not be used unless only as a last resort. Folded black ribbons can be worn on the lapel of suit jackets if uniforms are not available.

Funeral Procedures

Common standards are established for agencies to follow in providing honors to their fallen comrades. Providing casket/urn guards, escorts, colors, pallbearers and flag folding detail are common practices performed. This section will cover these practices and how to properly perform them. Personnel performing these procedures should be well versed in basic drill and maneuvers and able to perform them accordingly. Learning how to do basic drill maneuvers in a ceremonial manner should be practiced and performed by all members.

Casket/Urn Guards

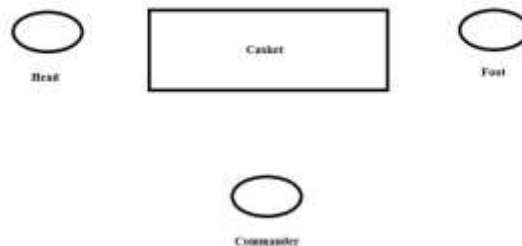
Casket guards are placed at the head and foot of the casket to show support for the deceased member and their family. The placement, exchange and retrieval of these guards should be done in a formal military type manner. One person should be in charge of the Guard. Normally guards are posted prior to and during visitation and prior to and up till the start of the actual funeral service. Having guards posted during the actual service should not be done as the services normally last quite a long time and the guard will not be able to be changed out without

interrupting the services. If a single guard is used, the guard should stand at the head of the casket. If the deceased was cremated and the remains placed in an urn and the urn is present for the services, the urn guard would stand to the right of the urn.

Initial Posting of Guards

Guards should be placed prior to the arrival of family and friends. The Guard Commander should lead the guard to the casket stopping approximately 4-5 feet from the casket. The team will render a salute in a slow ceremonial manner. The guard will step forward to a position at the head and foot of the casket and turn facing the front toward the audience. The Guards will stand at a position of either parade rest or more preferably, at the position of ceremonial parade rest until they are replaced or relieve. Teams should practice guard details constantly to get timing down and the basic movements consistent.

Although every location is hardly the same and size of the location varies, the basic principles of providing guard details should always be the same. Practicing these details is a must prior to posting so members will know how to perform. Most all units stand guard in a ceremonial manner which is the position of parade rest except with the hands in front, left hand over right. The head should be very slightly bowed and not over-exaggerated. The look you want is one of a somber appearance but maintaining a military style presence. Guards should not stand at the position of attention more than just a few minutes at a time to prevent mishaps from personnel passing out.

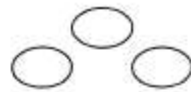


Posting of the Guard

Changing Guards

Changing Guards should be done every 15-20 minutes depending on the number of personnel available. Standing guard means standing perfectly still and not speaking or moving. Most personnel may have trouble standing in that position for more than 30 minutes at a time. Changing guards should be done in the same manner as the posting. The commander will lead the oncoming guard to the casket; render the proper salute to the casket and the off going guard, then take their position at the head and foot of the casket. Practicing the steps and proper movements to exchange the guards must be practiced constantly and prior to service to ensure all personnel are familiar with the proper procedures.

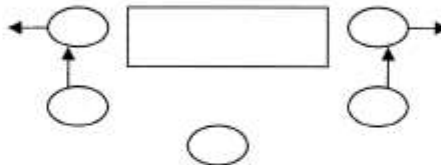
On the next page is a diagram of a standard guard post and change with a center aisle. Some areas will allow for this set-up, but some areas may only allow for the guards to enter from the side, or even the rear of the room/area. Planning and practicing before the event will determine which method to use. As the oncoming guard and commander approach, the current guard returns to the position of attention. This should be timed and coordinated so both guards move to attention at the same time. Commands should not be vocally given out loud. Low key commands only heard by the guards should be used. Silent commands such as nods or hand signals are preferred. This can be done without a commander.



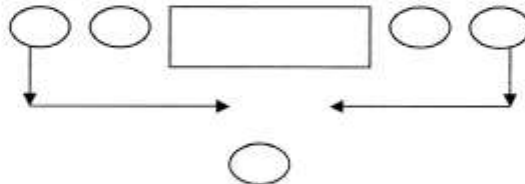
Rendering Salute to Casket



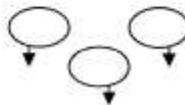
Rendering Salute to Guards



Off going Guard step aside,
On going Guard step
forward, faces about.



Off going Guard step
forward, face inward,
steps to the center. Faces.
Commander faces about.



Commander/Guards march away.

Retrieving Guards

Guards should be retrieved prior to the start of the service, usually after the family is brought in and seated. This must be coordinated between the Honor Guard Commander and the person(s) conducting the service. A lot of agency chaplains have some sense of how the order of service flows when a service involves Honor Guards. Then there are several who have never been involved in these type services and it's all new to them, so nerves are on edge and minut details may be forgotten. The person assigned to retrieve the guards must keep eye contact with the person starting the service to make sure they don't start too early and give you time to retrieve your guards. In the event the person conducting the service does start before you are able to retrieve the guards, don't panic, usually there is a song or some type of music shortly after the start and while the music is going it presents you an opportunity to get the guards and will actually look like it was planned that way. Working the plan may mean making last minute changes to make the plan work out.

Once the family has entered and everyone is seated, the guard commander will go and retrieve the final guard and render the final salute. This should be done with your best members' cause all eyes will be on you watching every movement. The commander will stop in front of the casket, the two guards come to attention, turn and face the casket and all three render a slow ceremonial salute. Once the final salute is given, the guards step out as previously planned and discussed and march away. These personnel may either return and sit with the other agency members, or remain in the back while the service is going on. This will also allow for the guard to reenter the service with the funeral home staff at the conclusion of the service when they retrieve the casket and provide escorts for the casket out to the hearse.

Family Escorts

Family escorts can be either agency members not assigned to the Honor Guard or can be other Honor Guard units present. These escorts are there to assist the family in whatever is needed from opening doors for them, providing an arm or shoulder to lean on. Some elderly family members may be wheelchair bound and will need assistance. Whatever the need is, no matter how minor, the escorts should be there to provide for the family. Escorts can be used in either level of service, especially LODD service, it is a traumatic event for everyone, especially the family, so having someone with them for support is a must.

Pallbearers

Majority of the time the family will choose special friends or close relatives to be the pallbearers for the deceased. Sometimes they may request the agency provide this service. This service should be considered a high honor for anyone. Those individuals chosen by the agency to provide pallbearers should be just like the Honor Guard, some of the best representatives the agency has. Most pallbearers are 6-8 personnel. If the casket is to be loaded onto a fire apparatus, you may need 2-4 more personnel assisting the pallbearers in loading the casket. Modern day fire apparatus has high hose beds that may require the use of ramps, lifts and plenty of extra hands in order to get the casket loaded. If the agency has, or has access to a good older model apparatus with a low hose bed, it may be wise to use it to avoid any problems. This should be thought of early in the planning process to make sure it is ready and in service.

Most pallbearers are guided by the funeral home staff. Very seldom will they not be involved in the moving of the casket. If you work with the funeral home staff a lot and they get used to working with you, that confidence will be built between the two, and they will work well in supporting the agency. Setting the casket on the church truck, the wheeled cart used to move a casket, takes practice to ensure the casket is straight and centered so mishaps with the casket is prevented and the casket rolls straight whenever it is moved from point to point. It would be a serious embarrassment on the funeral home and the agency if the casket slipped off the church truck, that's an event no one wants to ever have happen.

Pallbearers should be chosen carefully. They should be chosen for their size and ability to carry the weight of the casket for long distances over uneven terrain. All the bearers should be similar in size and stature. Able to keep the casket level at all times when it is being carried. This can be difficult when negotiating steps. Placing members capable of bearing the weight when the casket needs to be lifted to keep it level is important. Practice makes perfect, members should practice with a real weighted casket as much as possible to make sure all the little details will be worked out. Obtaining a casket for practice is as simple as contacting your local funeral home and simply asking to either practice at their facility or them donating a casket to your team. Placing weights or sandbags inside will make the training experience more realistic and training on loading, unloading and negotiating steps is all part of making your team better and ready and able to function at a moment's notice and do so in the most professional manner possible.

Moving the casket with the pallbearers should be coordinated and controlled by one individual just like the Color Guard is. The lead individual will give all commands to the bearers and guide the casket where it needs to be. Facing movements and marching while carrying a casket is very difficult.

Honor Guard: Urn Procedures



In this article I will talk about the honors given to a fallen officer who is cremated. As Honor Guard commanders you should make contact with the funeral director to see what type of urn the family has selected; urns come in all shapes, sizes and weights. A folded National Flag should be dropped off at the funeral home prior to the family's arrival. Inside the church two stands should be in place in front of the altar, one for the urn and one for the flag. We use a cherry wood easel to hold the flag in place. The T.A.R.S. Flag may be used in place of The American Flag.

The family normally arrives at the church with the urn long before the service starts. Most urns are transported to the church in a family vehicle, but for a Line of Duty funeral, I recommend a hearse to transport the officer's remains. Once they arrive, the vehicle door should be opened by the funeral director and two Honor Guard team members should march up to the car and family and render a hand salute. First team member should take the Flag. Then the second team member should take possession of the urn. The team member with the American Flag will march first toward the church and should carry the flag as shown in the picture. The other team member follows behind with the urn.

The urn is always set down first on the stand to the right when facing the altar. Then, the American Flag is displayed on the stand to the left. Once the flag and urn are in place, both team members should render a hand salute, take one step backward, do an about face, and march out of the church.

After the service, both team members march in and stop in front of the American Flag and urn. They should render a hand salute. The American Flag is picked up first and held as shown in the picture. Then the urn is picked up and both team members take one step backward and do an about face. The team member holding the American Flag steps off first followed by the team member with the urn.

Most of the time, the family will take the urn home in the family vehicle. If the urn is to be buried or placed in a mausoleum, you can elect to refold the flag over the urn prior to presenting it to the family or present the already folded flag to the family once the graveside service is over.

I imagine most Honor Guards do not routinely practice for this type of funeral service so it is important to have a procedure in place in the event that your fallen officer or retiree is cremated.