



Honoring Our Shipmates

The Heritage of the Military Funeral and Burial at Sea

#1 Rank Reversal

At a military funeral, honorary pallbearers and other mourners are positioned in reverse order of rank, a custom derived from the Ancient Romans to show that, at death, all are equal.



#2 Three Volleys

Three volleys are fired by a firing detail of seven riflemen, a custom that follows an old superstition to scare away evil spirits. Three volleys were also fired during the European dynastic wars when fighting was halted to remove the dead and wounded.



#3 Taps

The sounding of Taps was first played at a Civil War funeral in place of the three funeral volleys so as not to reveal the battery's position to the nearby enemy. Taps is a bugle call that comes from the French "L'Extinction des feux," meaning "lights out."



#4 National Ensign

The National Ensign is held over the casket or urn throughout the funeral service. This custom was done by the British Guard in the days before the American Revolution to show that the State takes responsibility for a soldier's death. The flag is folded 13 times and presented to the family of the service member.



FUNERAL HONORS & WHAT THEY INCLUDE

The following chart illustrates what is included in the funeral of a service member based on his or her military status. The military funeral honors detail for veterans consists of a minimum of two uniformed military persons, with at least one being a member of the veteran's branch of service.

	BODY BEARERS	FIRING DETAIL	SOUNDING OF TAPS	CEREMONIAL FLAG	HEADSTONE OR MARKER
ACTIVE DUTY & MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS					
RETIREES					
VETERANS					

BURIAL AT SEA

Burial at sea has taken place as long as people have gone to sea. Long ago, the body was sewn into a weighted sailcloth and slid into the sea. Today, burials at sea are conducted in a similar manner to shore funerals.



DID YOU KNOW?

During a military funeral, the casket is carried to the grave foot end first, except in the case of a chaplain's funeral. The body of a chaplain is carried head first in accordance with an old custom that, even in death, a chaplain should always face his or her flock.