

# Military Funeral Honors (MFH) Guidance

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## **Introduction**

This guidance supplements information contained in the Military Personnel Casualties and Decedent Affairs Manual, COMDTINST M1770.9A.

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## **Reference**

- A. Military Personnel Casualties and Decedent Affairs Manual, COMDTINST M1770.9A.
  - B. U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 1491 – Funeral honors functions at funerals for veterans
  - C. U.S. Code, Title 38, Section 101 – Definitions
  - D. U.S. Code, Title 10, Section 1482 – Expenses incident to death
  - E. SecDef memo of 17 Apr 2012 – Establishment of Uniform Military Funeral Flag Presentation Verbiage
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## **POCs**

Designated MFH Regional Coordinator; see <http://www.uscg.mil/psc/psd/fs/Casualty.asp>

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## **Discussion**

The Military Funeral Honors (MFH) program is authorized and directed by Refs A through D above. MFHs are a total force mission and a command responsibility. Increasing public, regulatory, and Congressional concern, coupled with rising Veteran awareness of this entitlement and the ubiquity of social media and instant news coverage, create an atmosphere of unprecedented high expectations.

Careful preplanning, pre-commitment of an appropriate share of unit resources, and timely and dutiful responsiveness to public requests for honors are essential to success. By its very nature, tasking for MFH will often have little lead time, but professional performance of funeral honors shall be executed. No unit is exempt from carrying out this important operational function performed in the public's eye.

The Coast Guard will provide a dignified ceremony that honors our profession and respects our shipmate. The minimum statutory requirement is a two-person detail, at least one of whom wears the respective Service uniform, to perform a folding and presentation of the national flag and render the playing of Taps.

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# Military Funeral Honors (MFH) Guidance

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## **MFH Regional Coordinators**

Decedent Affairs Officers (DAO) located at Bases, TRACENs, and other large CG units are designated as MFH Regional Coordinators and are responsible for assignment of all MFH requests within their geographic AOR, which aligns closely with District AOR boundaries but which, in some places, may cross between multiple Districts. A public releasable roster of MFH Regional Coordinators is available at <http://www.uscg.mil/psc/psd/fs/Casualty.asp>.

MFH Regional Coordinators are authorized and empowered to select the nearest available unit relative to the ceremony's location and DIRLAUTH to perform MFHs as needed. Again, no unit is exempt and shall respond when directed by the MFH Regional Coordinator. Any missed MFH shall promptly be reported to CG PSC via the Chief of Casualty Matters.

With the cancellation of the DoD MFH Tracking System in 2013, DAOs shall track all MFH assignments on locally maintained Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to help respond to periodic internal and external MFH inquiries. A sample MFH Tracker template is available at <http://www.uscg.mil/psc/psd/fs/Casualty.asp>.

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## **Qualified Coast Guard Veteran**

When requested by the next of kin (NOK), the Coast Guard shall provide a funeral honors detail for the funeral of a qualified Coast Guard Veteran IAW eligibility criteria outlined in Ref A.

A qualified Coast Guard veteran is anyone who served on active duty in the Coast Guard, or in the Coast Guard Reserves. No minimum period of service is defined.

The veteran must have been:

- Regular (active duty) or reserve (to include all reserve status) at the time of death, or
  - Retired (regular retirement, temporary or permanent disability retirement, or any non-regular retired status for a Reservist), or
  - Cadet at the Coast Guard Academy, per paragraph 21 of Ref B, or
  - Discharged or released with honorable discharge, or general discharge under honorable conditions.
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# Military Funeral Honors (MFH) Guidance

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## **Other Qualified Veterans**

- Veterans discharged or released with an honorable discharge, or general discharge under honorable conditions, are eligible for MFH. When requested by the next of kin (NOK), the Coast Guard shall provide a funeral honors detail for the funeral of a qualified veteran.
- PHS and NOAA veterans are entitled to MFH normally supported by the Coast Guard along with a representative from PHS or NOAA.
- World War II merchant seamen who served in harm's way are entitled to veterans status including MFHs. Because they sailed under naval orders during WWII, the U.S. Navy normally provides honors, but the Coast Guard may be requested to support.

## **Ineligible Veterans**

Enclosure 2, E2.1.9 of Ref C describes discharges and releases that are not acceptable for MFHs. While the documented character of service is significant, in rare cases a qualified veteran may become disqualified based on post-service criminal activity. Not all criminal activity is disqualifying.

Denial of requested MFHs for ineligible veterans is delegated to CG PSC.

## **Funeral Honors Detail**

The detail shall consist of at least two uniformed regular or reserve members of the armed forces, of which at least one must be Coast Guard.

The appropriate uniform is Service Dress Blue with combination cover.

While reserve members may be used while already drilling or activated, Reservists may not be brought onto orders solely to complete an MFH mission.

When reasonably available, the grade or rating of the senior member will be the same as, or higher than, that of the deceased. If a member of the same or higher grade or rating is not available by local travel, a senior member may be assigned whose participation would be consistent with the manners of our military profession.

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## Military Funeral Honors (MFH) Guidance

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### Funeral Honors Ceremony

The ceremony will include, at a minimum, the playing of Taps, the folding of a United States Flag, and presentation of the flag to the family of the veteran. The family or funeral director may direct additional honors outside the responsibility of the Honors Detail as part of the ceremony.

The typical sequence of events for an Honors Detail at an MFH ceremony is:

Step	Action	Comments
1	Muster at the ceremony site.	
2	Stand at ease in designated places as family members arrive.	
3	Stand at attention when deceased veteran arrives.	
4	Chaplain remarks.	
5	Gun salute.	
6	Playing of Taps.	Honors Detail responsibility. See page 5.
7	Flag folding.	
8	Flag presentation.	
9	Chaplain remarks.	
10	Dismissal at conclusion of ceremony.	

In general, whereas a bugler sounds Taps in a prominent position, to include a member using the ceremonial bugle, portable stereo players should be used as a last resort and be out of sight of the funeral party. The official version of Taps is played by a single bugle, and therefore, Echo Taps are not authorized. Taps may be played by a bugler, simulated using an electronic bugle, or played using a recording on audio equipment. Use of an electronic bugle is preferable.

Other musical tribute may be performed in addition to Taps. For example, a bagpipe salute may be provided by a member of the Coast Guard Pipe Band or a piper from another organization. Additional information is available at [www.uscgpipeband.org](http://www.uscgpipeband.org).

Additional honors may be rendered as requested and as available for the area and timing.

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## Military Funeral Honors (MFH) Guidance

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### **Flag Presentation Protocol and Flag Folding**

A United States flag drapes the casket of deceased veterans to honor the memory of their service to the country. The ceremonial folding and presentation of the flag is a moving tribute of lasting import to the veteran's family.

The flag is placed on a closed casket so the union blue field is at the head and over the left shoulder of the deceased. The flag should not be lowered into the grave or allowed to touch the ground.

After Taps is played, the flag is carefully folded into a triangle. When folded, no red or white is to be evident, leaving only the blue field with stars.

It is then presented to the next of kin or an appropriate family member as a remembrance of their loved one's service.

The Flag Presentation Protocol is as follows:

Stand facing the flag recipient and hold the folded flag waist high with the straight edge facing the recipient.

Lean toward the flag recipient and solemnly present the flag to the recipient.

“On behalf of the President of the United States, the United States Coast Guard, and a grateful Nation, please accept this flag as a symbol of our appreciation for your loved one's honorable and faithful service.”



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# Military Funeral Honors (MFH) Guidance

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## **National flags**

For the death of a veteran, retiree, or of a Reservist when not in the line of duty, the family receives one flag provided by the VA.

For the death of a regular member on active duty or of a Reservist while in a duty status, the Coast Guard provides a flag to the person authorized to Direct Disposition of the Remains (PADD) and to each eligible family member IAW Article 2.P.4.b of Ref A. Eligible family members are parents, (individually if they are not married), surviving spouse, and each child of the deceased guardian. Only one flag is presented to the PADD even if they are also an eligible family member.

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## **Reimbursable costs**

Support of military personnel casualties is an operational function of the Coast Guard; therefore, expenses associated with MFH are unit operational expenses that may be reimbursed IAW Ref D. All reasonable costs are reimbursable from CG PSC upon approval from the Chief of Casualty Matters. The reimbursement vehicle to units from CG PSC is an FTA.

Reasonable costs include transportation via the most expeditious manner, overnight lodging and per diem when required (due to remoteness of the location relative to the nearest available honors detail), and the purchase beforehand of adequate burial flags and unit-owned uniform items, bugles, and paraphernalia that directly support the performance of MFH ceremonies.

Every effort to use GVs, local travel, and other cost-saving methods should be employed; however, cost savings are never an excuse for a missed honors mission.

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