

CHAPLAIN HANDBOOK OF AIR FORCE FUNERAL PRACTICES

**Updated by Air Force Chaplains Office
Arlington National Cemetery
Chaplain, Colonel, Rick Hum
Chaplain, Capt, Bill Johnson
SSgt Maury Lovelady
Special assistance by SSGT John E. Payne (USAF HG)
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INTRODUCTION

To all of our Air Force Chaplains and civilian clergy, may this training manual be a useful tool to you and your ministry as you seek to render both spiritual and military honors to those men and women who have faithfully served our Air Force. Our military members deserve an honorable service as we lay them to rest, and may we never forget the spouses who faithfully stood by their side as well. The conduct of military funerals is an experience common to all chaplains. Whether at Arlington National Cemetery, at a base chapel, a suburban parish, or a small town church, our colleagues have distinguished themselves by sensitive, meaningful, and effective pastoral care in countless situations of grief and loss. We embody the empathy and concern of the entire religious community, which supports them in their hour of need, all in the context of powerful military traditions.

The Air Force Chaplains at Arlington National Cemetery are in no way the experts on rendering military honors, nor do we claim that this training manual is the only method. However, we do average around 1200 services per year, and we train with the USAF Honor Guard, the experts behind all that we do here; and at times, the ANC Chaplains conduct Joint Service funerals. Some of the information contained in this manual is based on years of tradition and is not found in an Air Force Instruction / manual. There will be on-site situations where a judgement call will be made; either by yourself or another member of the funeral detail. Flexibility and quick adaptation will make for a smooth service.

Our sole intention is to offer the best funeral training information that will allow you to conduct a service that is proper and fitting for the military member. In addition, we would like to share with you what we feel works best in the particular service being rendered, and to offer simple advice on how to tweak a service to make it more personal and professional. No two services are exactly alike due to the personality of family members, logistics, and emotions that come into play, but we can all play a part in helping to bring a closure to a grieving family.

To be sure, the military funeral is far more than the trappings and procedures of the service. Worship, preaching, and pastoral care are all-central as we minister to surviving family members and friends of the deceased. Our primary concern must be for the communication of caring, sensitive support. Yet, in a community where the proper military decorum is equated with the rendering of respect and honor, it behooves us as chaplains and clergy to be fully prepared to conduct military funerals in an orderly and professional way. In short, we must know what to do, when, and how to do it. Family members, funeral home representatives, and the honor guard will look to us for expertise and leadership, before, during, and after the funeral. We must be prepared to provide it.

Please do not hesitate to call the Air Force ANC staff, DSN 225-4584 or (703) 695-4584 if you have any questions or advice regarding funeral services. Any suggestions that you may have in order to make this training manual more productive are greatly appreciated. May God's blessings and favor rest upon you and your ministry as you seek to serve our Air Force family.

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Chapter 1 WHERE DO I BEGIN

This is probably the most important step you will take in the entire process. Making contact with the family or NOK before the service is so critical. Getting to know the family prior to the service will make your planning more smooth, and will also add to your own comfort level as well. Below is a list of what we feel are helps in this area.

NOK Phone Contact

Once you have a telephone number or a point of contact, you are ready to proceed:

1. Call the funeral home for an obituary before contacting family, this will save you a lot of time and questions. This information is very informative.
2. Introduce yourself to the NOK
3. Specifically call the NOK by name to ensure you are speaking with the right person.
4. Offer condolences up front.
5. Ask if this is the correct date and time of service.
6. Is this the correct full name of the deceased?
7. Is this the correct rank?
8. Faith / Denominational background if any?
9. Any particular passage(s) of Scripture or reading you would like me to read?

10. Will any family members / friends speak at this service? If yes, get the name and a telephone numbers and call this person as soon as possible. What is the military background of the deceased? (if not found in obit)
11. Personal hobbies/interests. (This is optional, but can give you additional insight into the deceased.)
12. Years married (if applicable)
13. Children?
14. Grandchildren?
15. Any questions for me?
16. Inform the NOK that you would like to meet them before the service if possible for any last questions.

Meeting NOK the day of service

1. Introduce yourself, speak clearly.
2. Offer condolences, again.
3. Any questions for me at this time?
4. Visually cue in on the flag recipient. Knowing this person is critical. It is not always the NOK.
5. Locate the other person(s) who are speaking, if any.
6. Inform NOK as to format of the service. This will be a major stress reliever for most family members.
7. Will you place flowers on the casket or urn at the gravesite? If yes, they can do this after the service is complete, and be sure to inform the cemetery representative of their desire to do so.

Meeting NOK with no prior contact

Ask questions 2-17 as if you were speaking to them by telephone. This is why you need to meet them at least ½ hour prior to the service; any later and you will be rushed. Walk them through the entire service, they will greatly appreciate this.

Also, do not allow the funeral home/director to run your service. Honor the desires of the family if they are not contrary to your faith practices, after all, it is their service. Allow the military honors to unfold in a smooth progression without interruption.

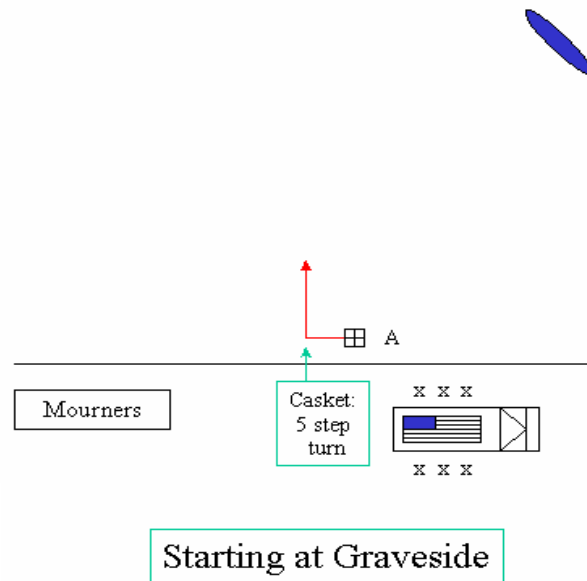
Chapter 2 CONDUCTING A SERVICE WITH HONORS

A. Honors service

An honors service in its simplest terms means that you are handing off the American Flag to the NOK. However, there is one exception to this. If the flag has already been presented to the NOK at a chapel service, there will be no flag at this service, only your committal remarks, and the Honor Guard firing party. It would also be helpful to meet the hearse (funeral director), commander, NCOIC or OIC before the service as applicable, to ensure that all parties involved are aware of the events as they unfold.

All Base Honor Guard (HG) are trained, or will be trained by the United States Air Force HG located at Bolling Air Force Base. The diagrams show the exact movements that the HG will make during this particular type of service.

Step one of this five step turn, depicts the casket being removed from the hearse; each step will then follow. Our suggestion to you is that when you see turn #3 being implemented, so position yourself in front of the HG by the time they are in turn #5. Turn #5 is when you will hear the command “step”. It is at this command that you will slowly step off and lead the processional to graveside as indicated above.



Once you are at the graveside, step off to the side, and allow the HG to carry the casket and place it on the mock-up, this is what holds the casket over the grave. Until the casket has been laid on the mock-up, you are to render a salute. Once the casket is on the mock-up, you may drop your salute. The HG will then lift the flag off the casket and bring it to “tabletop”, or unfold it if it is an urn and then bring it to tabletop. This means that the flag will be stretched tight as if it is lying on a table. The flag is then immediately folded and presented to the NCOIC. The bodybearers will then march off to prepare for the 3-volley salute. As the bearers are marching off this is your cue to begin your committal. The handing off of the flag by the NCOIC is optional. If the chaplain would prefer to do this, discuss this with the NCOIC prior to the service so that a proper hand off is carried out.

Once you have completed your committal, go back to the head of the grave, and render a salute, this will signal to the HG that military honors may begin. Maintain your salute during the 21-gun firing and the playing of Taps. Once the last note of Taps is finished you may drop your salute. The HG will now fold the flag. This is where your interaction with the HG is very important. Who is going to hand off the flag? Having the chaplain hand off the flag is a great touch and a fitting salute.

Chapter 3 PRESENTING THE FLAG

This may be the most emotional part of the service, that of presenting the American Flag. If you, the chaplain, are presenting the flag, the following words *may be helpful* as you are presenting.

On behalf of the President of the United States and a grateful nation, this flag is given to you for your loved ones devotion and duty to the Armed Forces of the United States. May God bless you, and may you always cherish it.

When presenting the flag, take note of a few particulars:

1. Speak slowly.
2. Speak clearly.
3. Look directly at the NOK.
4. Kneel down slowly and stand up slowly.
5. Render a final salute as you stand up. This is a fitting last gesture, for you are the last person representing the military who is touching the flag.

Chapter 4 FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN THE SERVICE

Whether you are in a memorial setting or at the gravesite, the family will be nervous and unsure as to what to expect. This is why your personal telephone call in advance will make for a smooth service where all participants are pleased and somewhat at ease. Extend the courtesy to have a family member speak at the service. Some families may feel that this is expected and may not ask you. Do not become blindsided by this event, it can easily happen.

This is the reason you ask the question, “will anyone be speaking at the service?” You would hate to show up thinking that you are the only one speaking and there be several who wish to speak. There goes your planning! Also, ask that the speaker(s) write down their words of eulogy, this will prevent rambling, it also provides for a clear train of thought, and a well-delivered speech. If you are conducting a chapel service it is helpful to know the time frame you’ve been allotted. Most chapels block more time than required, but knowing how much time you have is key.

Gravesite services are somewhat different, obviously. Memorial services can run from a few minutes to an hour or more, easily. A gravesite service is a committal, and tends to be brief, 10-15 min. Although gravesites are shorter, they still deserve all the dignity you can offer the family.

If a family member wishes to speak at the gravesite, allow them this honor. This may be the closure they are looking for.

Chapter 5 MILITARY HONORS STANDARD HONORS

For most chaplains, the following service will constitute the vast majority of funerals performed.

AT THE CHAPEL:

There is no specific chapel sequence required. Speak with the HG prior to the service to discuss any specifics. If the HG is used in the service, hats will not be worn, nor will any type of weapon be permitted in the chapel. Conduct the chapel service appropriately, and according to the dictates of the family's faith background.

AT THE GRAVESITE:

1. At the gravesite, the funeral director will show you where to stand. You should take up a position adjacent to the spot the hearse will stop when it arrives. Stand to one side, in close proximity to the OIC/NCOIC if present. Remain in position until the family and friends have likewise arrived and departed their vehicles. (Before the family arrives, you should determine from the funeral director or the pallbearers which end is the head of the grave, which is the place you will stand while conducting the committal service.)

2. When family and friends are ready to proceed to the gravesite, the funeral director will advise the OIC/NCOIC to proceed. The OIC/NCOIC will then give the command, "Secure." If you are in uniform, you should salute while the casket is removed from the hearse and turned toward the grave. If in vestments, place your right hand over your heart. You will then drop your salute and precede the pallbearers to the grave.

3. Take your position at the head of the grave, as advised by the funeral director or pallbearers. Make sure the pallbearers have sufficient space to pass you if you are positioned between the grave and hearse. The pallbearers will then place the casket on the lowering device. As the casket passes, you will present arms again. Hold the salute while the casket is placed upon the lowering device. Drop your salute in concert with the OIC/NCOIC standing at the foot of the grave; or if there is no military honor guard present with you, drop your salute when the casket has been lowered onto the grave gurney.

4. Survey the situation to ensure that all family and friends have drawn close to the grave. Normally, the funeral director will advise you to begin the committal service at this point. You may wish to remove your hat before you begin. If you choose to wear a stole over your military uniform, it should be put on at this point. Refer to chapter two for the folding of the flag and committal remarks.

5. After the service is completed, replace your hat (if you chose to remove it), remove your stole (if in uniform), take two steps back from the grave, and salute (or place your hand over your heart if vested). Your stepping back indicates to the OIC/NCOIC that the service is complete, and that the firing party may proceed with the firing of volleys and the playing of TAPS. Hold your salute until TAPS is completed and the command "Order Arms" is given. Continue to stand at attention.

6. There is no "script" or mandatory language involved in the passing of the flag to the NOK. Please see example on page 6.

7. After the presentation, and if you are in uniform, you may come to attention and salute the flag, as a gesture of respect. This is optional. At this time, the chaplain may wish to present any special guests or senior leaders/dignitaries to the next-of-kin, if it seems appropriate.

8. At this time, the funeral director will announce to all that the service is concluded, and that they should return to their transportation. You may, if desired, accompany the next-of-kin to his or her vehicle, and make whatever offers of future follow-up care and support seem appropriate.

9. The service is now complete. You may wish to remain until the next-of-kin vehicle departs. Return to the chapel in the funeral director's car.

FULL HONORS

If the procession is on foot, the chaplain is positioned immediately behind the Color Guard, and before the hearse bearing the remains. If circumstances dictate a procession by motor vehicle, the chaplain will ride with the funeral director, whose car should be immediately behind the pallbearers, and before the hearse. A good rule of thumb is that the chaplain always immediately precedes the remains.

Please keep in mind that even this type of service is dependent on the availability of troop staffing at any given base.

Chapter 6 SERVICE FOR CREMAINS

When honors are rendered for Cremains (ashes), the chapel service, procession to the grave, and graveside service will be conducted in similar fashion to the complete and standard funeral.

AT THE CHAPEL:

Again, the HG may or may not participate in a chapel service. If they do, then advance coordination on every ones part is essential!

AT THE GRAVESITE:

You and the flag bearers will await the vehicle conveying the urn. When the vehicle arrives, all come to attention and salute. Upon signal from the funeral director, you will lead the procession to the gravesite and take your position at the head of the grave. When the urn bearer has placed the urn on the lowering device, he or she then joins the flag bearers in unfolding the flag.

Chapter 7 MEMORIAL SERVICE

A memorial service may be conducted if remains have not been recovered, or where the funeral service will be conducted in another geographical location from the unit of assignment or place of residence. In the latter case, the memorial service affords the local community, including colleagues and/or friends of the deceased, the opportunity to pay their respects. In such cases, the request for a memorial service should come from the unit to which the member was assigned, or from members of the family of the deceased.

A chapel memorial service may be conducted with the following personnel as desired and available:

- a. Chaplain
- b. Flag bearer
- c. Color Guard
- d. Military band & bugler
- e. Firing Party (if graveside service is used)
- f. OIC/NCOIC or honorary pallbearers

As stated earlier, the HG may or may not participate. Pre-planning on the part of all parties involved is essential. But remember this one thing, military honors are only done ONE time.

Chapter 8 HONOR GUARD

The USAF Honor Guard resides at Bolling AFB, Washington, and DC. They are tasked with the training of all Base Honor Guard. If you have any questions regarding your specific functions or theirs, you may call DSN 754-6210.

You, the chaplain or civilian clergy, play a major role in conducting the service. It is highly encouraged that you speak with all parties who will be involved with the service. This is not only informative, but it prevents any embarrassment from occurring. Likewise, we encourage you to tell them of any special remarks other than yours that are being made at graveside. With every participant in the loop, the service should flow smoothly, and the family walking away proud of the United States Air Force!

AFTER THE FUNERAL:

A note written to the family soon after the funeral will be most appreciated. If the family resides in the local area, a follow-up visit several months after the funeral will be helpful in expressing pastoral concern, and in determining how the family is adjusting.

SPECIAL NOTES:

Places to go for additional information:

1. Air Force chaplains at Arlington National Cemetery (DSN 225-4584 **or** commercial 703-695-4584).
2. The USAF Chaplain Service Institute (DSN 493-2821 *or* commercial 334-953-2821).
3. Personal Affairs or Mortuary Affairs personnel at your base.

RESOURCE BIBLIOGRAPHY

The chaplain's primary tools for bereavement ministry are, of course, to be found in the assurances of sacred Scripture. In addition, the worship books and hymnals of most denominations and faith groups provide appropriate words and scripture passages to comfort the grieving. As ordained clergy, all chaplains will be aware of such resources from their own traditions.

Nevertheless, the collegial style of Chaplain Service ministry leads naturally to opportunities for us to learn and grow from one another, and to be enriched by other traditions. The following brief bibliography, by no means exhaustive, draws from many parts of the Judeo-Christian community in an effort to enrich the practice of our ministries, and broaden our understanding of pastoral practice with bereaved persons.

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- The following Scriptographic booklets may also be useful to your ministry with bereaved persons.



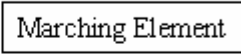
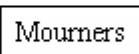





About Suicide
What Every Christian Should Know About Grief

Facing Death as a Christian
About Depression
About Suicide Among Young People

These booklets are available from the Channing L. Bete Co. Write for a catalog to 200 State Rd., South Deerfield, MA 01373-0200, or call 1-800-628-7733.

The chaplains at Arlington National Cemetery wish to offer a special thank-you for all the support given by the staff of the Chaplain Service Institute at Maxwell AFB, Montgomery, Alabama.

Symbols for Funeral Charts: Air Force

	Chaplain		Color Guard
x x x	Pall Bearers		Marching Element
B	Bugler		Mourners
	Firing Party		or  Casket
	Hearse		Grave
U	Ushers		

