Introduction

At some point, Chaplain, you likely will be assigned the task of officiating a funeral service and/or graveside service for a fallen comrade who is being laid to rest somewhere in your region. Privately (and understandably), this assignment may not be the most welcome news of your day, especially considering your schedule is already packed and you have other deadlines looming. Nonetheless, this is an opportunity for you to provide some of the most honorable and meaningful pastoral ministry of your career!

Moreover, we are here to help! The intent of this Handbook is to keep you from feeling like you need to “reinvent the wheel,” and to provide you with concise, practical guidance as you aim to honor the fallen and comfort the family and friends of the deceased.

The Air Force Chaplaincy at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) conduct nearly 1,400 funerals per year; we train and work daily with USAF Honor Guard (HG), the experts on Military Honors and ceremonial procedures; and we conduct perhaps the most highly-visible funeral services in the nation. The guidance we offer is not the only way of doing things, but we are confident this is a good way of doing things. We hope it helps!

Of course, every service is unique, and this Handbook does not intend to cover every situation imaginable. Therefore, if you need further assistance, please contact us: DSN 224-0887, or Comm (703) 614-0887, or Email usaf.jbanafw.afdw-staff.mbx.11-og-hc-a@mail.mil.

Sincerely,
ANC Chaplains
Part 1: Pre-Service Preparation

Mindset. Chaplain, you will be working alongside Honor Guard members who are trained to be “a picture-perfect example of individuals who are highly motivated, maintain exceptionally high standards of conduct, both on and off-duty, and exude enormous amounts of pride in all they do.” (USAF HGMAN, 23 Nov 2015) While your primary role will be that of a pastor, you must also remember your role as an officer. It is not reasonable to expect you to have mastery over all ceremonial movements and sequences; nevertheless, it is worthwhile for you to have familiarity with the movements that will take place at your service. Furthermore, it is important that you possess enough knowledge, so that your actions do not bring discredit upon the Chaplain Corps. Nothing like a little added pressure, right?

Flow of Info. Generally, the family of the deceased member (or, Decedent) will work with a local funeral home. Either the Decedent’s next-of-kin (NOK) or the Funeral Home Director will contact your installation’s Mortuary Affairs Office to begin the process of requesting a military funeral service with Honors. At that point, Mortuary Affairs will notify the base Honor Guard, as well as initiate contact with your Wing Chaplain to request chaplain support (if requested). Your Wing Chaplain will delegate the task to your supervisor, and your supervisor will offer you the “opportunity to excel”!

Your next free moment should be filled with reviewing this Handbook! If/When you realize you may need more information regarding the Decedent or more information about the NOK, work through your chain-of-command, of course, but you will likely find the Mortuary Affairs Office personnel and the funeral home personnel to be valuable sources of information (i.e. the type of service you will be officiating). Ultimately, your objective will be to contact the NOK directly and establish a pastoral relationship. In Part 2 and Part 3 of this Handbook, you will discover more specific guidance for establishing this relationship.

Types of Services. Discover which type of service you will be officiating, so you can focus on that type of service in the appropriate section of this Handbook. The following is an overview of the two most common types of services you will be called on to officiate:

- Minimum Honors Service: Commonly referred to as a “Veteran Service,” a Minimum Honors service is conducted for Air Force members who served and separated without retiring. A Minimum Honors service will involve two or three HG members, depending on the base HG’s manning.

- Standard Honors Service: Commonly referred to as a “Retiree Service,” a Standard Honors service is conducted for Air Force members who served and retired from the Air Force. A Standard Honors service will involve seven HG members.

- Note: A third type of service is a Full Honors Service. Commonly referred to as an “Active Duty Service,” a Full Honors service is conducted for Air Force members who died while on active duty. A Full Honors service will involve twenty HG members. Typically, Full Honors services are the least common, yet they are the most highly-visible. The details of a Full Honors service will not be covered in this handbook; howbeit, the instructions herein (coupled with a preliminary conversation with the HG
NCOIC assigned to the service) will lay a solid foundation if you are ever called upon to officiate a Full Honors service. Moreover, once again, you are welcome to contact the ANC Chaplains for further guidance.

**Initiate Contact.** The key word is “initiate” ... be proactive, take initiative! This may be the most important step you take in preparing for a successful service. So ...

- As soon as possible, contact the NOK for a pastoral call. Your call serves 1) to establish a pastoral relationship with the NOK, 2) to gather biographical information in order to personalize the ceremony. (Tip: Prior to contacting the NOK, it may be beneficial and time-saving to obtain a copy of an obituary by searching online or contacting the funeral home, if you have that information.)

- Introduce yourself: “Hi, this is Chaplain __________ from __________ Base. May I speak with [NOK’s] Firstname Lastname? ... I’m calling to discuss the service for ___________ that’s scheduled for next week. Is this a good time to talk?” ...

  “Let me begin by offering my condolences.”

- Discover/Verify information you may already have:
  - Transition: “I have some information I would like to go over with you. Is that ok?”
  - NOK’s go-by name. “What would you like me to call you?”
  - NOK’s relationship to the Decedent. “I understand you are the daughter of [Decedent’s] Firstname Lastname, correct?” Or, “I understand you were married to [Decedent’s] Firstname Lastname, correct?”
  - The Decedent’s go-by name. “What name did your dad like to go by? ... Is that what you would like me to call him?” // Tip: Verify the correct pronunciation of the Decedent’s full name, and note it somehow.
  - The Decedent’s military rank. “It looks like Decedent was a Master Sergeant in the Air Force, correct?”
  - Verify that the NOK has indeed requested a religious service, and that there is no misunderstanding on religious preference (e.g. expecting a Catholic priest, getting a Protestant chaplain). “I understand you have requested a Protestant military chaplain for the service? ... I am a Protestant military chaplain, and I am honored to officiate this service.”
  - Confirm date, time, and location of the service.
  - NOK’s email address, in case you intend to follow-up with email communication.

- Determine whether the NOK, a family member, or a friend would like to share eulogy remarks at the committal service. // Tip: Request a copy of any planned remarks. This serves two purposes: 1) In case the individual gets a bit overwhelmed with emotion, you will be able to step in; 2) It will help you gauge the time of the service, knowing how much time you will have remaining. (Inform the guest speaker of time limits.)

- Gather biographical information. Tip: If time and opportunity permits, your phone call may provide an opportunity to offer meaningful pastoral care. Thus, it may be worthwhile to “linger” a bit on the phone. The following points may be helpful in offering meaningful pastoral care.
Transition: “I hope to make the service memorable and meaningful for you and your guests. Also, I would like to make the service personal, if possible, but I will need your help with that. … Would you mind if I asked you a few questions to help me get to know Decedent a little better?”

Gather military career info: “What did Decedent do in the military?” / “What were Decedent’s favorite assignments?” / “What were Decedent’s favorite memories or stories from his/her time in the military?” / “What awards or medals did Decedent receive for his/her military service?”

Gather family bio info: “What are your favorite memories of Decedent?” / “Do you have any humorous stories you can tell about Decedent?” / “Did Decedent have any quirky habits or sayings that family members remember him/her for?”

Gather post-military career info: “After the military, what did Decedent do for a living?” / “Were there any favorite stories Decedent liked to tell about his/her career?”

Gather personal interests: “After military/retirement, how did Decedent spend his/her time? Was he/she involved in any civic groups, a church, or any local organizations?”

“Were some of Decedent’s favorite hobbies or favorite ways to spend his/her time? Was he/she involved in any civic groups, a church, or any local organizations?”

“What were some of Decedent’s favorite hobbies or favorite ways to spend his/her time? What can you tell me about Decedent’s faith background or religious practices?” / “If I asked you to describe character of Decedent [or, to capture the essence of Decedent in your own words], what would you say?”

- Tip: During this conversation, be sure to get correct pronunciations of names and places you may refer to during your remarks.

- Conclude. “NOK, before we hang up, once again, please accept my condolences to you for your loss. I’m so glad we’ve had this chance to talk, and it’s been a privilege for me to learn more about Decedent; so, thank you for sharing this time with me. I look forward to meeting you next week. Until then, you will be in my prayers.”

- Email the NOK (if applicable). You may or may not need to follow-up the phone call with an email. You may find that the phone call was so informative, no other information is necessary. On the other hand, if you find the NOK was not ready or able to converse with you, it may be helpful to follow-up with an email. // Tip: Once the NOK sends an email, send a quick reply, acknowledging receipt. (That’s one less thing the NOK needs to worry about, “Did the chaplain get my email?”)

Preparing the Script
- At least one day prior to the scheduled service, write and print your script. (In case you are unexpectedly absent, your script should be readily available for a substitute chaplain to fill-in.)
- Write your script nearly verbatim to your planned remarks, in order to avoid impromptu, unguarded remarks.
- We recommend you plan your speaking time, beginning with your introduction and ending with your final “Amen,” to be 10-15 minutes. Write your script accordingly.
- Tip: Place your script in a black, professional-looking binder.
- Refer to “Part 4: Sample Scripts” of this Handbook for ready-to-use templates.
Dress & Appearance
- In most cases, you will wear your Service Dress. Ensure your uniform is flawlessly clean, neatly pressed, highly polished, and properly adorned (i.e. updated medals).
- Optionally, you may don your wheel cap and/or your white gloves, which will align with what the Honor Guard members will be wearing.
- In the event of cold weather, contact the HG NCOIC to check whether overcoat, raincoat, black gloves, scarf and/or ear muffs may be worn.
- Tip: During transit, wear the lightweight jacket and maintain your blouse in a protective garment bag.
- Ensure you are well-groomed, maintaining a neat and clean-cut appearance.
- In summary, present yourself as an “icon of excellence.”

Miscellaneous Items of Interest
- Coordinate with your supervisor to determine your means of transportation, whether you will be authorized a GOV, ride along the Honor Guard, or something else.
- Confirm service time and location address.
Part 2: Officiating the Service  
(Minimum Honors Service)

Survey the Gravesite Area.
- Arrive to the site NLT T-30 minutes.
- Meet the HG NCOIC and discuss/verify the following: 1) your initial posting position at the roadside curb, 2) the pathway of travel for the casket/urn from the roadside to the gravesite, 3) your eventual posting position near the head of the gravesite while the casket/urn passes by and is placed, and 4) whether Honors will occur before or after the chaplain’s remarks. (Except for extenuating circumstances, Honors should be last.)
- Tip: Choose your eventual posting position near the “head” of the gravesite, so that 1) you will not block the pathway of the HG members’ transporting the casket/urn; 2) you will be able to view both the gravesite and the family seating area simultaneously.

- Remains vs Cremains:
  o Some services involve a casket for the Decedent’s remains. The casket, draped by a US Flag, will be transported to the site in a hearse.
  o Whereas, some services involve an urn for the Decedent’s cremains. The urn, accompanied by a US Flag, will be transported to the site in the funeral director’s vehicle or the NOK’s POV.
- Tip: In order to provide HG members with a “big picture” mentality, share with them a bit of info about the Decedent and/or the NOK. Also, while your primary objective centers on honoring the Decedent, remain vigilant for opportunities to minister to the HG members.

Standby for the Arrival of the Remains/Cremains.
- At T-5 minutes, pre-position yourself beside the HG NCOIC, along the roadside curb with backs to the gravesite, and await the arrival of the hearse (casket)/POV (urn). Post at-ease and await the HG NCOIC’s commands.
- At T-0, the hearse/POV will approach, transporting the flag-draped casket/ flag-accompanied urn. As the hearse/POV approaches, the HG NCOIC will call “Staff, Tench Hut.” Come to attention in unison. As the hearse (with flag-draped casket)/POV (with flag-accompanied urn) begins to pass you, the HG NCOIC will call, “Present Arms.” Present arms in unison.
- Once the hearse/POV has passed, the HG NCOIC will call, “Order Arms.” Order arms in unison. Once the hearse/POV has stopped and parked, the HG NCOIC will call “Stand At Ease.” Stand at-ease in unison.
- After the Funeral Director and family have parked, excuse yourself to introduce yourself to the Funeral Director and the NOK. (The HG NCOIC may join you.)

Meet the Funeral Director, the NOK, and Family/Guests.
- Your visit with the Funeral Director serves as a professional courtesy, and nice segue to meeting the NOK along with family and guests.
- Your visit with the NOK serves to 1) continue the ministry of comfort you began earlier on the phone, 2) meet the NOK and family members/guests face-to-face, prior to the actual service, and 3) get any clarifications you may need on bio information.

- Following your brief visits with the Funeral Director and the NOK, excuse yourself to go position yourself along the roadside curb (with back to the gravesite), within a few steps of the entry point to the pathway leading the casket/urn from the roadside curb to the gravesite. Stand there “at-ease” and await the Funeral Director’s go-ahead.

- Meanwhile the HG members will position themselves, as follows:
  o For a casket: with you along the roadside curb, to allow family pallbearers to access the hearse
  o For an urn: at the rear of the POV, facing the POV, since the HG members will retrieve the urn and the US Flag from the POV

**Lead the Transfer of the Remains/Cremains.**

- **The Bail-out Option:** If the steps to “Lead the Transfer,” as described below, seem to be overwhelming, simply remain with the Funeral Director and/or family, and observe from a distance. Salute momentarily while the casket/urn is being removed from the hearse/POV, and hold your salute until the pallbearers/HG members have proceeded a few steps along the pathway from the roadside curb to the gravesite. Otherwise ...

- You will lead the transfer of the flag-draped casket or flag-accompanied urn from the roadside curb to the gravesite.

- For a flag-draped casket:
  o The family will provide pallbearers to transport the casket.
  o Once the Funeral Director gives the go-ahead signal, the pallbearers will approach the rear of the hearse, and the HG NCOIC will call “Staff, Tench Hut.” Come to attention in unison. Once the casket is in motion, the HG NCOIC will call, “Staff, Present Arms.” Present arms in unison. Once the casket passes by, the HG NCOIC will call, “Order Arms.” Order arms in unison.
  o Then, the HG NCOIC will call “Right-/Left-face,” which is your cue to execute military movements to face the pathway (e.g. right-/left-face toward the pathway, forward march 2-3 steps to the entry point of the pathway, and right-/left-face to face the pathway)
  o Pause briefly facing the pathway, and then begin your slowly-cadenced march from the roadside curb to the gravesite, to your predetermined posting position, near the head of the gravesite. Be careful not to block the path of the pallbearers.
  o The pallbearers should follow behind, carrying the flag-draped casket. Once you have reached your predetermined posting position, turn to face the gravesite and the family seating area simultaneously, and stand at attention momentarily.
  o As the flag-draped casket passes by, present arms long enough for the flag to pass by, and then order arms and stand at attention.
  o The HG will follow behind the casket and, once the casket has been placed on the lowering device, take their designated positions, one at the head of the casket/gravesite and one at the foot of the casket/gravesite.
After the HG has positioned themselves, they will simultaneously stand at-ease. Thereafter, follow suit, and stand at-ease.

Meanwhile, the Funeral Director will escort the family to the seating area and prepare them for the service.

- For a flag-accompanied urn:
  - Two members of the HG will transport the urn and the US Flag.
  - Once the Funeral Director gives the go-ahead signal, the HG NCOIC will call “Staff, Tench Hut.” Come to attention in unison. The two HG members will proceed ceremoniously to either side of the POV, one to retrieve the urn and one to retrieve the flag. As the urn and flag are removed from the POV, they will simultaneously turn to face the rear of the car, and begin their ceremonial march in that direction.
  - As the HG removes the urn and flag, present arms long enough to allow them to simultaneously turn to face the rear of the car, and march in that direction for 1-2 steps. Then, order arms.
  - After ordering arms, execute military movements to face the pathway (e.g. right-/left-face toward the pathway, forward march 2-3 steps to the entry point of the pathway, and right-/left-face to face the pathway).
  - Pause briefly facing the pathway. From behind you, the HG will initiate your march by calling, “Step.” Upon hearing “Step,” begin your slowly-cadenced march (left foot first) from the roadside curb to the gravesite, to your predetermined posting position, near the “head” of the gravesite. Be careful not to block the path of the HG.
  - The HG should follow behind, carrying the flag-accompanied urn. Once you have reached your predetermined posting position, turn to face the gravesite and the family seating area simultaneously, and stand at attention.
  - As the flag-accompanied urn passes by, present arms long enough for the flag to pass by, and then order arms and stand at attention.
  - The HG will proceed to the urn table at the gravesite, one at the “head” of the urn table/gravesite and one at the “foot” of the urn table/gravesite.
  - The HG member carrying the urn will place the urn on the table. Meanwhile, the HG member carrying the flag will maintain a stance holding the flag.
  - Once the HG has positioned themselves, they will simultaneously stand at-ease. Thereafter, follow suit, and stand at-ease.
  - Meanwhile, the Funeral Director will escort the family to the seating area and prepare them for the service.

Officiate the Service.
- Once the family is in place, look for a go-ahead signal from the Funeral Director, and then proceed with your service.
- Your allotted speaking time, beginning with your introduction and ending with your final “Amen,” should be 10-15 minutes.
- Your remarks will typically include the following elements:
Present Minimum Honors.
- Minimum Honors will include the playing of “Taps” and the presentation of the US Flag to the NOK (whereas Standard Honors will also include the firing of three volleys of fire).
- As mentioned earlier, you should discuss with the HG NCOIC whether the presentation of Honors will occur before or after the chaplain’s remarks. (Except for extenuating circumstances, Honors should be last.) This Handbook assumes Honors will occur after the chaplain’s remarks.
- After your final “Amen,” proceed with the presentation of Minimum Honors, which will include: 1) playing of “Taps”; 2) presentation of the US Flag to the NOK.
- Introduce Honors (Optional). The presentation of Honors is a key component of any military funeral service. You may be able to set the stage quite nicely with a brief introduction: “In Washington DC, there is a monument to a great American hero. The inscription thereon reads, ‘In life he honored the flag; in death the flag shall honor him.’ Firstname honored the flag with his service to our nation; now it’s our privilege to present our nation’s flag in honor of Firstname Lastname, Rank, United States Air Force.”
- Announce to the family, “If able, please rise for Military Honors.”
- Face the US Flag held by the HG (without turning your back on the family members, if possible) and come to attention. Remain at attention while the HG folds the flag. (Note: For an urn, since the flag is transferred in a folded position, it will first be unfolded, and then folded.) Once the flag is folded, present arms for the playing of “Taps.” After “Taps,” order arms and stand at attention.
- Announce to the family, “Please be seated.” Remain at attention while the HG NCOIC presents the flag to the NOK, and then departs.
- Note: If you are interested in presenting the flag to the NOK, refer to “Part 4: Sample Scripts” of this Handbook for instructions.

Conclude the Service. Once the HG has departed, proceed to shake hands with and express condolences to the family members, primarily those seated along the front row. “NOK, it has been an honor for me to participate in this service, so thank you for sharing this moment with me. God bless you.”
Part 3: Officiating the Service
(Standard Honors Service)

Survey the Gravesite Area.
- Arrive to the site NLT T-30 minutes.
- Meet the HG NCOIC and discuss/verify the following: 1) your initial posting position at the roadside curb, 2) the pathway of travel for the casket/urn from the roadside to the gravesite, 3) your eventual posting position near the head of the gravesite while the casket/urn passes by and is placed, and 4) whether Honors will occur before or after the chaplain’s remarks. (Except for extenuating circumstances, Honors should be last.)
- Tip: Choose your eventual posting position near the “head” of the gravesite, so that 1) you will not block the pathway of the HG members’ transporting the casket/urn; 2) you will be able to view both the gravesite and the family seating area simultaneously.
- Remains vs Cremains:
  o Some services involve a casket for the Decedent’s remains. The casket, draped by a US Flag, will be transported to the site in a hearse.
  o Whereas, some services involve an urn for the Decedent’s cremains. The urn, accompanied by a US Flag, will be transported to the site in the Funeral Director’s vehicle or the NOK’s POV.
- Tip: In order to provide HG members with a “big picture” mentality, share with them a bit of info about the Decedent and/or the NOK. Also, while your primary objective centers on honoring the Decedent, remain vigilant for opportunities to minister to the HG members.

Standby for the Arrival of the Remains/Cremains.
- At T-5 minutes, pre-position yourself beside the HG NCOIC, along the roadside curb with backs to the gravesite, and await the arrival of the hearse (casket)/POV (urn). Post at-ease and await the HG NCOIC’s commands. Meanwhile, the remaining HG element will post nearby, across the road, facing the gravesite.
- At T-0, the hearse/POV will approach, transporting the flag-draped casket/flag-accompanied urn. As the hearse/POV approaches, the HG NCOIC will call “Staff, Tench Hut.” Come to attention in unison. As the hearse (with flag-draped casket)/POV (with flag-accompanied urn) begins to pass you, the HG NCOIC will call, “Present Arms.” Present arms in unison.
- Once the hearse/POV has passed, the HG NCOIC will call, “Order Arms.” Order arms in unison. Once the hearse/POV has stopped and parked, the HG NCOIC will call “Stand At Ease.” Stand at-ease in unison. Meanwhile, the remaining HG element will maneuver ceremoniously to a position behind the hearse/POV, facing it.
- After the Funeral Director and family have parked, excuse yourself to introduce yourself to the Funeral Director and the NOK. (The HG NCOIC may join you.)

Meet the Funeral Director, the NOK, and Family/Guests.
- Your visit with the Funeral Director serves as a professional courtesy, and nice segue to
  meeting the NOK along with family and guests.
- Your visit with the NOK serves to 1) continue the ministry of comfort you began earlier
  on the phone, 2) meet the NOK and family members/guests face-to-face, prior to the
  actual service, and 3) get any clarifications you may need on bio information.
- Following your brief visits with the Funeral Director and the NOK, excuse yourself to go
  position yourself along the roadside curb (with back to the gravesite), within a few steps
  of the entry point to the pathway leading the casket/urn from the roadside curb to the
  gravesite. Stand there at-ease and await the Funeral Director’s go-ahead.
- Meanwhile the HG NCOIC will position himself/herself in formation along with the HG
  element, behind the hearse/POV, facing it.

Lead the Transfer of the Remains/Cremains.
- The Bail-out Option: If the steps to “Lead the Transfer,” as described below, seem to be
  overwhelming, simply remain with the Funeral Director and/or family, and observe from
  a distance. Salute momentarily while the casket/urn is being removed from the
  hearse/POV, and hold your salute until the pallbearers/HG members have proceeded a
  few steps along the pathway from the roadside curb to the gravesite. Otherwise ...
- You will lead the transfer of the flag-draped casket or flag-accompanied urn from the
  roadside curb to the gravesite.
- For a flag-draped casket:
  o Once the Funeral Director gives the go-ahead signal, the HG will approach the
    rear of the hearse, and prepare to remove the casket from the hearse.
  o Once the flag-draped casket is in motion, being slid along for all the HG members
    to grasp, present arms long enough to allow all HG members to grasp the casket
    and begin stepping away from the hearse for 1-2 steps. Then, order arms.
  o After ordering arms, execute military movements to face the pathway (e.g. right-
    /left-face toward the pathway, forward march 2-3 steps to the entry point of the
    pathway, and right-/left-face to face the pathway).
  o Pause briefly facing the pathway. From behind you, the HG will continue
    removing, maneuvering and perhaps rotating the casket. Then, the HG will
    initiate your march by calling, “Step.” (Listen for three short commands, such as,
    “Up ... Face ... Step.”) Upon hearing “Step,” begin your slowly-cadenced march
    (left foot first) from the roadside curb to the gravesite, to your predetermined
    posting position, near the “head” of the gravesite. Be careful not to block the
    path of the HG.
  o The HG should follow behind, carrying the flag-draped casket. Once you have
    reached your predetermined posting position, turn to face the gravesite and the
    family seating area simultaneously, and stand at attention momentarily.
  o As the flag-draped casket passes by, present arms long enough for the flag to
    pass by, and then order arms and stand at attention.
  o After the HG places the casket on the lowering device, they will grasp the flag
    and pull it to “tabletop,” that is, stretched out over the casket, like a table top.
Then, they will stand at a modified at-ease, maintaining “tabletop.” Thereafter, follow suit, and stand at-ease.

- Meanwhile, the Funeral Director will escort the family to the seating area and prepare them for the service.

For a flag-accompanied urn:

- Two members of the HG will transport the urn and the US Flag, accompanied by the remaining members of the HG element.
- Once the Funeral Director gives the go-ahead signal, two HG members will proceed ceremoniously to either side of the POV, one to retrieve the urn and one to retrieve the flag. As the urn and flag are removed from the POV, they will simultaneously turn to face the rear of the car, and begin their ceremonial march in that direction to return to the remaining HG element.
- As the HG removes the urn and flag, present arms long enough to allow them to simultaneously turn to face the rear of the car, and march in that direction for 1-2 steps. Then, order arms.
- After ordering arms, execute military movements to face the pathway (e.g. right-/left-face toward the pathway, forward march 2-3 steps to the entry point of the pathway, and right-/left-face to face the pathway).
- Pause briefly facing the pathway. From behind you, the HG will initiate your march by calling, “Step.” Upon hearing “Step,” begin your slowly-cadenced march (left foot first) from the roadside curb to the gravesite, to your predetermined posting position, near the “head” of the gravesite. Be careful not to block the path of the HG.
- The HG should follow behind, carrying the flag-accompanied urn. Once you have reached your predetermined posting position, turn to face the gravesite and the family seating area simultaneously, and stand at attention.
- As the flag-accompanied urn passes by, present arms long enough for the flag to pass by, and then order arms and stand at attention.
- The HG will proceed to the urn table at the gravesite, where the HG member carrying the urn will place the urn on the table.
- Thereafter, the HG will ceremoniously unfold the flag. After the flag is unfolded, they will grasp the flag and pull it to “tabletop,” that is, stretched out over the casket, like a table top. Then, they will stand at a modified at-ease, maintaining “tabletop.” Thereafter, follow suit, and stand at-ease.
- Meanwhile, the Funeral Director will escort the family to the seating area and prepare them for the service.

Officiate the Service.

- Once the family is in place, look for a go-ahead signal from the Funeral Director, and then proceed with your service.
- Your allotted speaking time, beginning with your introduction and ending with your final “Amen,” should be 10-15 minutes.
- Your remarks will typically include the following elements:
Present Standard Honors.

- Standard Honors will include the firing of three volleys of fire, the playing of “Taps” and the presentation of the US Flag to the NOK (whereas Minimum Honors does not include the firing of three volleys of fire).
- As mentioned earlier, you should discuss with the HG NCOIC whether the presentation of Honors will occur before or after the chaplain’s remarks. (Except for extenuating circumstances, Honors should be last.) This Handbook assumes Honors will occur after the chaplain’s remarks.
- After your final “Amen,” proceed with the presentation of Standard Honors, which will include: 1) the firing of three volleys of fire, 2) the playing of “Taps”; 2) the presentation of the US Flag to the NOK.
- Introduce Honors (Optional). The presentation of Honors is a key component of any military funeral service. You may be able to set the stage quite nicely with a brief introduction: “In Washington DC, there is a monument to a great American hero. The inscription thereon reads, ‘In life he honored the flag; in death the flag shall honor him.’ **Firstname** honored the flag with his service to our nation; now it’s our privilege to present our nation’s flag in honor of **Firstname Lastname, Rank**, United States Air Force.”
- Announce to the family, “If able, please rise for Military Honors.”
- Face the US Flag held by the HG (without turning your back on the family members, if possible) and come to attention. Remain at attention while the HG folds the flag. (Note: For an urn, since the flag is transferred in a folded position, it will first be unfolded, and then folded.) Once the flag is folded, all except one HG member will depart to fill their respective roles as the firing party. The remaining HG member will maintain the flag.
- Allow time for the firing party to assume their position and begin shouting commands. Upon hearing the firing party’s commands, while facing the flag, present arms for the firing of the volleys of fire and the playing of “Taps.” After “Taps,” order arms and stand at attention. Remain at attention while the HG NCOIC presents the flag to the NOK, and then departs.
- Announce to the family, “Please be seated.” Remain at attention while the HG NCOIC presents the flag to the NOK, and then departs.
Note: If you are interested in presenting the flag to the NOK, refer to “Part 4: Sample Scripts” of this Handbook for instructions.

Conclude the Service. Once the HG has departed, proceed to shake hands with and express condolences to the family members, primarily those seated along the front row. “NOK, it has been an honor for me to participate in this service, so thank you for sharing this moment with me. God bless you.”
Part 4: Sample Scripts

NOTE: Some of these Sample Scripts may reflect a specific Christian tradition. Please feel free to copy, in part or in whole, to modify, or disregard at your discretion.

Patriotic Introduction / Welcome

Sample 1: “Good morning/afternoon, and welcome to __________ Cemetery. Since the time of our Founding Fathers, our nation has honored her fallen patriots at services much like this one. These hallowed, marble stones that surround us stand as solemn memorials to the men and women who answered our nation’s call to serve. Some served but a few years; some served many years; and some made the ultimate sacrifice; but, each one served so that we may have the freedom we all enjoy to this day. Today we have gathered to remember and honor one of our nation’s heroes. Today, we honor: Rank Firstname Middlename Lastname.”

Sample 2: “Centuries ago, the Prophet Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord, saying: ‘Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?’ Then [Isaiah] said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’ [Isaiah 6:8] Today we’ve gathered to remember and honor one of our nation’s heroes, who answered the call to go. Today, we honor: Rank Firstname Middlename Lastname.”

Invocation

“Almighty God, whose days are without end, whose mercies cannot be numbered, and whose love is an everlasting love, we have gathered today for this purpose: to honor the memory of Firstname Lastname. We give You thanks for the gift of life and for the ability to remember—to remember not only our own lives, but also to remember the lives lived by those we love, who have preceded us in death. Please grant to us clarity of mind, please flood our thoughts and imaginations with fond memories of Firstname.

In addition, I pray that Firstname’s loved ones will encounter Your presence and experience Your peace, a peace that surpasses understanding, even amidst the most difficult and sorrowful seasons of life. Please send Your Spirit to answer this prayer and meet us in this, our hour of need. Amen.”

Scripture / Encouraging Thoughts

Major Ballou Quote (very touching message for a surviving widow): “During the Civil War, a Major from the Union Army, Major Sullivan Ballou, wrote a letter to his wife the week before he was killed at Bull run: ‘If the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they love, I shall always be near you; in the gladdest days and in the darkest night ...always, always ... if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath; as the cool air fans
your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by." ... **NOK**, I believe **Firstname** would share those same sentiments with you!

**Woodrow Wilson Quote:** “In 1912, Woodrow Wilson was elected as our nation's 28th President. As World War I broke out in 1914, Wilson maintained an unwavering policy of neutrality. The idea of war brought back his earliest memories when, as a 4-year old boy growing up in Augusta, GA, he witnessed the horrors of the Civil War, when his dad’s local church was converted into a make-shift hospital for Confederate soldiers, and he heard the gruesome stories about Gen Sherman marching into Atlanta and burning it to the ground. (Note: It was Wilson who presided over the dedication of the sculpture, "New South," the centerpiece for the Confederate section of Arlington.)

Wilson absolutely despised the notion of war. However, he recognized the valor of those soldiers who fought in wars. In 1914, on Memorial Day, Wilson gave a speech at Arlington, saying, "I can never speak in praise of war, ladies and gentlemen. But there is this peculiar distinction belonging to the soldier ... He is giving everything he hath, even his life, in order that others may live." // **NOK**, we can be proud of **Firstname**’s service to this country: he gave a part of himself, so that we may live in freedom.”

**The Memorial Stone:** “It’s very appropriate that here where **Firstname**’s ashes will lay in rest, a stone will mark the spot. The Stone has great historical significance:

It’s been selected for its purpose: It’s the mason’s cornerstone; It’s the builder’s foundation; It’s the landowner’s property marker; It’s the historian’s monument; And now it will serve here as a lasting memorial for **Firstname Lastname**.

The Stone has also been selected for its perseverence: It withstands the ravages of time and elements; When the wood, mortar, and clay have washed away, the stone remains; It’s a present reminder of what once was ... and what still is.

The Bible uses the stone in a number of symbolic ways: The Psalmist saw God as the steady rock on which he stood (Psalm 62:2 - *[God] alone is my rock and my salvation...I will never be shaken.*); Jesus established his teachings as the rock, the firm foundation, on which to build our lives (Matthew 7:24-25 - “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”); The Hebrew Children placed Stones of Remembrance as a legacy of God’s deliverance at the Jordon River (Joshua 4:1-7 - *When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua,* 2 “Choose twelve men from among the people, ... 3 and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan ... and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.” ...*In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’* 7 *tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. ...*These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.*”)

The stone that will be placed here will honor the memory of **Firstname Lastname**. Though he no longer is among us in body, his memory will remain.

May those who see the stone that will be placed here be reminded ... Of a "steady rock" who heroically served his country, and whisper a prayer of gratitude; May those who see the stone be reminded ... Of a family who’s lost a firm foundation, and whisper a prayer for
comfort; May those who see the stone be reminded ... Of a "legacy" not bound by flesh, and whisper a promise never to forget.”

**Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi:** “**Firstname**’s life of unselfishness brings to mind the poem often attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi during the 13th century: *Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; [where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith;] where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.*

*O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.*”

**“Well Done!” (Matthew 25:23):** In the Gospels, Jesus shared a story in which a master gave three servants an amount of talents to care for during his upcoming extended absence: to one servant he gave 1 talent, to another, he gave 2 talents, and to a third servant, he gave 5 talents. Upon returning, the master discovered what each servant had done with their talents. The servant with 1 talent did nothing, and he was rebuked. However, the servant with 2 talents and the servant with 5 talents both invested their talents and doubled them. The master had the same message for both servants: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You’ve been faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” …

*Talent (NKJV) = bag of gold (NIV) // Perhaps **Firstname** has heard similar words from his/her Lord: “Well done, good and faithful servant! ... Enter into the joy of the Lord!”

**23rd Psalm (one of the most popular readings at Arlington National Cemetery):** “Some 3,000 years ago in Ancient Israel, lived a man known as King David. To this day, King David is Israel’s most beloved king. But, David was not always a king. As a young lad, David was simply a young, shepherd boy who watched over his father’s flock of sheep. In time, David grew to love the sheep. Then, it happened! David recognized a correlation: the way a shepherd loves his sheep is the same way God loves His people. So, David wrote a song, in which he imagined himself as the sheep and God as his Shepherd. Today, we know that song as the 23rd Psalm.

As we gather on this hallowed ground, in the shadow of death, I would like to recall the words of that beloved Psalm. As I do, I invite you to imagine yourself as the sheep and the Lord as your Shepherd:

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

*He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters.*

*He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.*

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*”
Ecclesiastes: “A moment ago, I spoke about King David. King David had a son named Solomon, who also served as Israel’s king. As we gather for this committal, I’d like to read a few words written by Solomon, in the book of Ecclesiastes:

To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; A time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time of war, and a time of peace... [God] has made everything beautiful in its time.”
(Ecclesiastes 3, selected verses)

Benediction & Committal

“Lord, please look down in compassion on those whose joy has been turned into mourning because of Firstname’s departure. Do not leave them comfortless. Sustain them now and in the days to come with fond memories and the power of hope.

And now, unto the mercy of Almighty God, we commend the soul of Firstname Lastname, now departed, and we commit his/her remains to their final resting place, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; we do so in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.” (Isaiah 6:24-26)

Presentation of the Flag to the NOK

The HG NCOIC is quite accustomed to presenting the flag to the NOK. For the sake of simplicity, it may be best to maintain this custom. However, if you feel comfortable and confident with officiating a military funeral, you may wish to discuss with/request from the HG NCOIC the opportunity for you to present the flag to the NOK. While this will involve an extra layer of stress, it also presents a very gratifying experience. So, if you and the HG NCOIC decide ahead of time that the chaplain will present the flag:

- After “Taps,” order arms and stand at attention.
- The HG member nearest you will then approach you and present the flag to you.
- Accept the flag with your right hand on the bottom and your left hand on top. Pause there long enough to allow the HG member to render a salute. After saluting, the HG member will return to his position.
- Rotate the flag 180 degrees (so that you are not “stabbing” the NOK with the point of the flag).
- Step (left foot first) toward the NOK, who will typically be seated on the front row in the seat farthest toward the head of the gravesite.
- Once you reach the NOK, kneel down onto your right knee, present the flag gently toward the NOK, allowing him/her to grasp it simultaneously with you.
- Proceed with the following statement, memorized verbatim, as directed by the Secretary of Defense (in a memo dated 17 Apr 2012): “On behalf of the President of the United States, the United States Air Force, and a grateful nation, please accept this flag
as a symbol of our appreciation for your loved one’s honorable and faithful service.”
Then complete the transfer of the flag to the NOK.
- Stand at attention and render a solemn, three-count salute (three seconds up; hold three seconds; three seconds down).
- Step away and return to a position near the head of the gravesite and stand at attention until the HG has departed.

Resources

Air Force Manual 34-515, USAF Honor Guard, 11 August 2015

Chaplain Handbook of Air Force Funeral Practices, 2002

USAF Honor Guard Manual, 23 November 2015