

## QUESTIONS ABOUT CEREMONIAL AND HISTORICAL FACTS

### **Q1. When do honors start for the former president?**

A1. In accordance with U.S. Code, honors commence with the half-staffing of the flag immediately upon receipt of the notification of the death of an authorized individual. In addition, cannon salutes are fired on the day after demise on all installations equipped to do so.

### **Q2. What are the origins of the military honors and other elements in presidential burial ceremonies and do they have ties to traditions of other countries, like Great Britain or France, for instance?**

A2. Several military traditions employed today have been brought forward from the past.

**The honor guard** – There are approximately 700 members in the Armed Forces Honor Guards stationed in the National Capital Region (NCR). The Ceremony Activities Division of the Operation Directorate, U.S. Army Military District of Washington at Fort Lesley J. McNair, D.C., routinely coordinates all joint-service activities in the NCR.

**Guard of Honor** - During a state funeral, the joint service guard is posted at the corners of the casket while the remains lie in repose or state, to display continuous respect to and provide security for the remains. The guard is dressed in ceremonial uniform and armed with rifles with fixed bayonets. Officers wear side arms.

**Flag at half-staffing** – The term “half-staff” means the position of the flag when it is one-half the distance between the top and bottom of the staff.

When a president, former president or president-elect dies, the flag will be flown at half staff for 30 days from the date of death during the period of reveille (dawn) to retreat (dusk).

When the president of the United States directs that the flag be flown at half staff at military facilities, on naval vessels and at stations abroad, it will be flown whether or not the flag of another nation is flown at full staff alongside the U.S. flag.

**Flag-draped casket** - The practice of draping the casket with the national flag began during the Napoleonic Wars (1796-1815). The dead, carried from the field of battle on a caisson, were covered with flags. When the U.S. flag covers the casket, it is placed so the union blue field is at the head and over the left shoulder. It is not placed in the grave and is not allowed to touch the ground.

**21-gun salute** – The tradition of saluting can be traced to the Middle Ages practice of placing oneself in an unarmed position and, therefore, in the power of those being honored. The cannon salute might have originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the maritime practice of demanding that a defeated enemy expend its ammunition and render itself helpless until reloaded – a time-consuming operation in that era.

In the Anglo-Saxon Empire, seven guns was a recognized naval salute, seven being the standard number of weapons on a vessel. Because more gunpowder could be stored on dry land, forts could fire three rounds for every one fired from sea, hence the number 21. With the improvement of naval gunpowder, honors rendered at seas were increased to 21 as well.

Beginning in our colonial period, the United States fired one shot for each state in the Union. This was continued until 1841 when the shots were reduced to 21 from 26. Although the 21-gun salute was in use for more than 30 years, it was not formally adopted until Aug. 18, 1875. This was at the suggestion of the British, who proposed a “Gun for gun return” to their own 21-gun salute. Today, the 21-gun salute is an internationally recognized honor rendered to heads-of-state.

**Flyover** – Flyovers with a missing man formation are provided at funeral or memorial services in honor of rated active-duty aviation personnel, and dignitaries of the Armed Forces or federal government. During a state funeral, the flyover consists of 21 tactical fighter aircraft, in formation as a single lead aircraft followed by five flights of four aircraft each. The number three aircraft in the final flight executes the missing man maneuver. *NOTE: President Kennedy was the first president to receive a flyover, which consisted of 50 fighter aircraft, with a missing V formation.*

**Q3. Are former presidents eligible for burial at Arlington National Cemetery?**

A3. Yes, former presidents are eligible for interment at Arlington National Cemetery. Additional information regarding Arlington National Cemetery can be found at [www.arlingtoncemetery.org](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org).

**Q4. Are there currently any presidents buried in Arlington National Cemetery?**

A4. Yes. There are two former presidents buried in Arlington National Cemetery. President William H. Taft was buried in 1930 and President John F. Kennedy was buried in 1963. For more information about Arlington National Cemetery, please visit [www.arlingtoncemetery.org](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org).

**Q5: Has any president ever had an open casket?**

A5. Yes. The Historians Office at the Architect of the Capitol indicates that five former presidents have had open caskets: Lincoln- 1865, Garfield- 1881, McKinley- 1901, Harding- 1923 and Taft- 1930.