



The 21 Gun Salute

The twenty-one gun salute is one of the most ceremonial honors paid to officers that are killed in the line of duty. I want to talk about this honor in some detail to give Honor Guard Commanders an understanding of the protocol involving the use of a firing party at a police funeral.

Firing parties should only be used when an officer is killed in the line of duty. I cannot stress this enough. Should a firing party be used for an officer who is retired, has died of natural causes, killed off-duty or is a friend of the Sheriff or Chief? The answer is no. The only exception for an officer who is not killed in the line of duty is a former military veteran being buried at a national cemetery. In that event, the military branch that the officer served with should conduct the firing party.

Your firing party should consist of seven team members and be lined up by height from shortest to tallest. A dress right dress should be called to get your proper spacing. They should be visible to the attendees at the cemetery when possible; normally the high or low ground works best to position your team. Your firing party commander should stand no more than ten feet away, and be viewing the firing party and funeral service.

After the last rights are given at the grave side service your firing party should render the twenty-one gun salute with three volleys. This is the proper order and protocol for an officer killed in the line of duty. All commands for the firing party should be very loud. You want as many people as possible at the funeral to hear the firing party commander. After the third and final volley, the firing party commander will call the team to present arms at which time Taps should be played if the family requests it. After Taps, the firing party commanders should give commands to the team softly so only they can hear them.

There are a variety of weapons your team can use for firing parties. We have seen pistols, shotguns and rifles to include: M-1's, M-14's and AR-15's. We collect the casings after the service, put them into a white glove and give them to the family.

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