

The Rifle Salute

The practice of firing three rifle volleys over the grave at a Military funeral originated in the old custom of halting the fighting to remove the dead from the battlefield. Once each army had cleared their dead, it would fire three volleys to indicate that the dead had been cared for and that they were ready to fight again. The fact that the firing party often consists of seven riflemen, firing these volleys does not constitute a 21-gun-salute. It is the three volleys that are significant, not the number of rifles. Three volleys fired over the casket have become a tradition to mean the dead have been cared for. It has evolved into a military salute for the deceased serving their country. Firing the three volleys over the casket is one of the highest honors to give a deceased military veteran. Our nation's highest honor is a flag draped over the casket, folded, and then presented to the family. Tradition is to place three spent shell casings inside the folded flag to prove now and forevermore that the deceased and his flag have had proper military honors. The actual 21 gun salute belongs to the Navy and in the past was performed by ships in the harbor as a visiting head of state arrived by ship. In modern times it is no longer performed.