

Wisconsin Honor Guard Association

Category II – Law Enforcement Funeral

Recommended Protocols

*“Duty is the most sublime word in our language. Do your duty in all things.
You cannot do more. You should never wish to do less.”*

Gen. Robert E. Lee

Statistically speaking, Law Enforcement Officers will be involved in Category II funerals far more often than Category I “Line-of-Duty Death” funerals. Furthermore, it is with the utmost certainty that a Law Enforcement agency will invariably have to cope with the “Off-Duty Death” of an active Law Enforcement Officer or retiree. With this information in mind, it follows that there is both an expectation and a presumption by those within and outside of the profession that a Law Enforcement agency is prepared for this eventuality.

These factors are further amplified if an agency lays claim to having an Honor Guard unit. In fact, the survivors, the Law Enforcement community, the agency itself, and others connected to the deceased will regard the Honor Guard as the primary entity responsible for laying their officer to rest in a ceremonious, reverent manner. And while the complexities of a Category I funeral can be vastly different from a Category II funeral, an Honor Guard unit should be no less dedicated and committed in performing its duty.

To this end, an agency can be better prepared for conducting non-Line-of-Duty Death funerals by developing related policy and procedure far in advance of such events. This preparation will also inevitably enhance the agency’s confidence and competency should it have to coordinate, participate in, or conduct a Category I – Line-of-Duty Death funeral.

In closing, the following information is not definitive in nature; however, it serves as a guideline for conducting Category II Law Enforcement funerals.

What is a Category II Funeral?

Category II funerals are associated with the death of an active, “good-standing” sworn Law Enforcement Officer who is not on-duty or with the death of an honorably retired Law Enforcement Officer. The phrase “good standing” refers to a death that is not associated with:

- A criminal act or;
- An attempt to avoid prosecution of a criminal act, or;
- Any other equally dishonorable action.

An agency must consider all the factors surrounding a member’s death in order to determine whether honors should be afforded and to what extent. This process can be difficult and even controversial. For instance, what is an agency to do if a well-decorated retired officer of 25 years dies in a felonious vehicle crash? There are no easy answers to such questions. However, proper preparation by an agency in terms of its policy and procedure can help ensure rational decision-making methods are employed rather than those based on emotion.

Suicide

When an agency needs to address the funeral arrangements surrounding a suicide by an on-duty, off-duty, or retired Law Enforcement Officer, it is important to proceed cautiously, so as to avoid passing judgment as to the reason(s) for the officer’s suicide.

WHGA holds that the ceremonious activities surrounding a Law Enforcement Officer’s funeral are to honor the way in which the officer served, and therefore, should not be impacted by the circumstances of his or her death by suicide (with notable exceptions being previously addressed).

It is also the opinion of WHGA that the death of a Law Enforcement Officer by suicide does not rise to the level of a Category I funeral. However, our Board has concluded that a death by suicide could, and most often should, fall within the classification of a Category II funeral, based on the information herein.

Planning and Coordination of Category II Funerals

While a Category II funeral will usually be smaller in scope and complexity than its Category I counterpart, considerable planning is, nonetheless, essential for the proper delivery of ceremonious honors and for the effective use of Honor Guard and agency personnel.

In most circumstances, a well-trained Honor Guard unit will be able to handle all the duties associated with a Category II funeral. However, an agency must be mindful not to overburden

its Honor Guard unit (or its personnel), particularly when a large response of Law Enforcement is expected.

Accordingly, thoughtful consideration must be employed to ensure that the following assignments are properly addressed and staffed (ICS considerations):

1. Incident Commander – a higher-ranking individual with decision-making authority, to be the overall Commander of events.
2. Liaison Officer – point of contact for all outside agencies / military.
3. Operations / Safety Officer – ensures proper relief is arranged during the operational period, scouts venues, and coordinates safety activities such as bomb sweeps (dignitary in attendance).
4. Planning / Logistics Officer – plans the chronological chain of events and acquires all the necessary elements.
5. Ceremonies Group Leader – coordinates ceremony-related activities and functions.
6. Traffic Group Supervisor – handles and plans traffic considerations (including parking).
7. Family Liaison Officer – the main point of contact for family/survivors.
8. Public Information Officer – coordinates contact with the media.

Procedural Elements

There are numerous ceremonious honors that can be associated with a Category II funeral. Many of these activities are also used in connection with Category I funerals; however, similar Category II activities are normally on a smaller scale. Of all the different honors to be considered, a flag-draped casket (National Colors), a Firing Party, and the playing of Taps are those activities which will generally garner the most attention and scrutiny.

Flag-Draped Casket (National Colors)

The use of a flag-draped casket stems primarily from internal traditions of the military and not from a recognized source such as the United States Flag Code. This is often contrary to conventional thought. Moreover, no known documentation exists from any source that precludes the use of the National Flag for a non-Military, Law Enforcement funeral. After extensive research, deliberation, and discussion, it is the *opinion* of WHGA that the commitment and dedication demonstrated by an officer by his or her service to their community can be best commemorated by the placement of the National Colors over his or her casket. Therefore, it is the opinion of WHGA that it is appropriate to have the National Colors draped on a casket and/or presented to individual(s) surviving the decedent in all Category II funerals.

Rifle Firing Party and the Playing of Taps

It is the opinion of WHGA that some ceremonious honors must be reserved for those Law Enforcement Officers who die in the line-of-duty. Consequently, it is WHGA's *recommendation* that a Rifle Salute (3 volleys) and the playing of Taps be *reserved only for Category I Law Enforcement Funerals*.

Other Ceremonious Functions

Ultimately, it is incumbent upon the Incident Commander to determine what Law Enforcement honors will be afforded during Category II funerals. This determination should be minimally based upon the following considerations:

- The wishes of the family/survivors of the decedent;
- The needs of the officer's agency;
- The needs of the community;
- The agency's ability to deliver certain components.

Some ceremonious elements that agencies can consider incorporating are as follows:

1. Casket / Urn Watch: Two officers at the head and foot, or a single officer posted at the head of the casket, with periodic guard change.
2. Shrouded Squad: Cleaned and polished agency squad with a black-shrouded light bar, displayed at a prominent location.
3. Stand of Colors: National and State Flags appropriately displayed at the casket/urn.
4. Ceremonial Pillow: Color-coordinated pillow with agency patch/emblem, placed in a prominent location, with fallen officer's cover/hat.
5. Rifle posting: Rifle(s) ceremoniously posted outside the venue.
6. Cordon of Honor: Other attending officers positioned outside venue during casket movements, brought to Attention, and salute as casket passes by.
7. Moving Salute during Visitation: Coordinate officers from other agencies filing past casket/urn to salute.
8. Casket Team: Officers/civilians assigned as Pallbearers for casket/urn movements.
9. Color Team: Officers present colors at the arrival and departure of the survivors.
10. Squad Processional: Officers assigned for squad escorts. including a lead squad, the Missing Man (Shrouded) Squad, in which the single occupant cares for secondary flags needed at gravesite, and a rear squad.
11. Flag Folding Team: Officers ceremoniously fold the flag that drapes the casket/urn.
12. Bag Piper: Plays appropriate musical selections at each venue.
13. Final Salute: Departmental Honor Guard renders a Final Salute at the end of visitation or graveside ceremony.

This is a short discussion and compilation of suggestions to serve as a ready reference to Law Enforcement Agency Heads in the task of planning and carrying out a Category II Funeral. There are several variables that may come into play, however, effective preparation and the utilization of the Honor Guard Community will certainly demonstrate an agency's commitment to its Law Enforcement family. Moreover, this will leave a lasting memory that, even though their loved one gave the ultimate sacrifice, they did not perish alone.

The Wisconsin Honor Guard Association (WHGA) serves as a resource to assist Law Enforcement Agencies in Honoring our fallen Brothers and Sisters in the most traditional and time-honored ceremonious way, during the most tragic time in the life of the survivors and the agency, in general.

*Wisconsin Honor Guard Association
Chair Matthew Lewek
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