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**Wisconsin Honor Guard Association**

**Standard Operating Procedure**

**Three-Person Flag Folding**

The Wisconsin Honor Guard Association’s (WHGA) Board has researched, discussed, and evaluated honor guard protocols in order to develop a “best practice” recommendation. The following SOP is a way that WHGA has adopted for a 3-person Flag Fold and realizes this SOP is not the only way to accomplish this. WHGA also encourages and recognizes individualism amongst honor guard teams**.**

*This protocol will address the 3-person Flag Fold; a separate protocol addresses the 6-person detail. This protocol is an option when circumstances dictate, such as logistics at a gravesite. Additionally, this protocol uses only 2 members to pick up flag from casket to move it laterally to begin the folding, and as such, accommodates a casket with an attached lid, and the team cannot pass behind it, either to place the casket on the rollers or retrieve it to begin the folding.*

*The positions in this protocol are referred to as Commander and Member #1 and Member #2. Flag folding members should make every attempt to practice folding the actual flag which will be draped on the casket (or at least an identical pressed flag provided by the same funeral home). This will require practice time prior to the service.*

*(Actual commands will be capitalized with the action word being stated in* ***BOLD.)***

1. The Flag Team will stage in a pre-determined location.
   * The first actual command will vary depending on the sequence of events, and what elements are included, however, when the OIC gives indication to the Flag Team Commander, the Commander shall command “Detail, ATTEN-**TION**”, and “Forward-MARCH”**.**
   * Flag Team will then march to the casket following a predetermined route.
     + Members #1 and #2 will approach casket with Member #1 at the head and Member #2 at the feet.
     + Commander will march to pre-determined standby position (generally near the foot of the casket) and come to Attention.
     + Members #1 and #2 will raise the flag off the casket and hold the flag with the surface parallel to the floor, over the casket at approximately tie-pin height.
     + In circumstances that include a Rifle Salute and Taps, the Flag Team will “table top” the flag prior to the Rifle Salute and hold until the conclusion of Taps. (Folding of the flag begins after the conclusion of Taps. Bagpipes may play a song during this and through presentation of the flag(s).)
     + “Table-topping” the flag entails both members tipping the top/blue field edge of the flag up, to display it to the audience.
       - * Member #1 and Member #2 will side step out from the casket to the pre-determined location for the fold, generally, right in front of the family.

Member #1 and Member #2 will then begin folding the flag into half and then quarters:

The two flag holders will make eye contact. Member #2 (on the stripe side) will perform an outward tug on the flag to signal the first fold to be made.

Members move the hand holding the red stripe side to the hand holding the blue field side, handing off the edge to the hand holding the blue field side. For this fold only, do not allow edges to meet, but keep 1-2 inches short, to ensure no red will show at finish.

Members slide empty hand down edge of flag to locate new fold. Pull flag taut and bring folded flag to horizontal, at tie-pin height.

Members fold again, as above. Bring the hand holding the new red stripe fold to the hand holding the blue field side, handing it off. Meet edges this time. Slide empty hand down edge of flag to locate new fold. Pull flag taut and bring flag to horizontal, at tie-pin height.

*The Flag Team is now standing with the flag at approximately tie-pin height, after being folded in half twice, with the surface of the flag parallel to the floor. The Commander will now march into a position at end of flag, near member #2, but at 90 degree angle. The completion of the second half-fold will be the signal for the Commander to march to position.*

1. Triangle folds
   * The Commander will grip with both hands, at body-width apart, on the stripe end of the flag.
   * Member #2, maintaining a grip on the stripe end, and, with short side steps, will move to a position facing the Commander, adjusting hand to the side of flag in similar position to the Commander’s hands.
   * Member #1 will remain stationary, holding tightly onto the flag while the other two move with their folds towards Member #1.
   * The Commander and Member #2, now facing each other, will perform a series of 13 triangle-shaped folds.
     + The first fold occurs from the side opposite the blue field side. Folder moves the end of flag over to the other folder, creating the first triangle.
       - Most folds should be pushed just to inside of edge of flag (on both sides) in effort to keep red from showing at finish. Keep fold very tight, and using one hand, new fold can be flattened and neatened, prior to next fold.
       - Folders complete folds within the plane of the body.
       - Member #2 and the Commander will perform one side step with each even numbered fold – making eye contact with each other to signal each step. The side step occurs with the leading foot (closest to Member #1), and then bring trailing foot together - back to position of Attention.
2. Tucking the flag
   * Upon completion of the 13 folds, the Commander will grip the end of the flag from Member #1. Member #1 will return to the position of Attention:

* In even rhythm, member moves his/her open hands come up to the shoulders, closing hands upon reaching straight up. Elbow should be in down position. (this takes 1 count)
* Member drops hands straight down to position of Attention, at seam/stripe. (count 2)
  + Member #2 will pull the flag close in to body, keeping it horizontal, to stabilize the flag while the Commander tucks the loose portion into the triangle.
    - The Commander will attempt to conceal any striped portion of the flag or the white seam into the triangle fold, striving for a flat triangle and without lumps or bunches.
      * Options are folding over a too-long end (creating a rectangle), or folding over a small triangle, which will be tucked into long side of the folded flag.
* Once the Commander is finished tucking the flag, he/she will assume the position of Attention facing Member #2.

1. Inspecting and Handing over the Flag to Presenter
   * Member #2 will pull the folded flag to their chest with the blade side towards the sky, holding the flag with hands on both bottom edges of the flag, with fingers on the outside and pointing up.
   * The Flag Team Commander will visually inspect the flag, using eye movements to indicate any areas needing to be fixed.
   * Member #2 will remove one hand at a time, keeping flag tucked against chest, and attempt to fix any areas needing fixed as indicated by the Commander. Do not look down at flag while tucking.
   * When the Commander is satisfied with the appearance of the flag, he/she will look into Member #2’s eyes to signal the flag is ready for presentation.
     + - Member # 2 will then lower the flag to parallel with the floor, “left hand over right” (left hand on top of flag, right hand underneath). Flag will be approximately just above belt height.

The Commander will then take possession of the flag, also “left hand over right”.

Member #2 will release the flag to the Commander, returning to Attention, and then render a 3-second hand salute.

The Commander will then march to the person to receive the flag. (*If a dignitary, such as the Sheriff or Chief or designee is to present the flag, they will be instructed on flag etiquette prior to the flag folding ceremony. In some cases, the Commander may be presenting the flag to the family.)*

While walking with the folded flag, the flag remains parallel to the floor with the blade facing the body of the holder.

The Commander will then face the Presenter.

The Presenter will come to Attention and render a 3-second salute.

Upon completion of the 3-second salute, the Commander will rotate the flag to present the blade of the flag to the Presenter.

The Presenter will receive the flag with the “left hand over right”.

The Presenter will hold the flag in this position, while the Commander renders a 3-second salute.

The Commander will then return to a line with Member #1 and #2, assuming the position of Attention, at a predetermined location during the flag presentation.

1. Presenting the flag

*Prior to the Presentation of the Flag, the Presenter will be made aware of the person who will be receiving the flag.*

* + - The Presenter will march to the designated person to receive the flag, holding the flag parallel to the floor, with the blade side facing their own body.
      * + Upon arriving at the Receiver, the Presenter will rotate the flag so that the blade of the flag is now facing the Receiver.
        + It is generally recommended that the Presenter drop to one knee. As the Receiver’s hands come to the flag, the Presenter should take a firm hold of the bottom hand of the Receiver, to help ensure that the Receiver will hold onto the flag jointly with the Presenter, until after he/she has made their statement of recognition.
        + The Presenter will then make a statement to the Receiver similar to the following:

“On behalf of the [agency] and a grateful community, please accept this flag as a symbol of [decedent’s name] service to his/her community”

* The Presenter may add a limited personal statement.
* The Presenter will then assume the position of Attention and render a 3-second salute, and then return to the designated position for the Presenter.

*In situations that permit, the Flag Team will ceremoniously march away from the grave or presentation site at this time.*

* Upon completion of the flag presentation, the Religious Leader (or Funeral Director) will provide closing announcements and state that the services have concluded.
* The overall event OIC will then “DISMISS” all uniformed personnel present.