



**SARATOGA NATIONAL CEMETERY
HONOR GUARD ASSOCIATION
SCHUYLERVILLE, NEW YORK**

**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES - HG 5:
RIFLE HANDLING, TRANSPORT, FIRING, CLEANING,
INSPECTION, & STORAGE**

This Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) supersedes all previous editions of Standard Operating Procedures addressing rifle safety and operational protocols.

PURPOSE: This SOP defines and provides guidance to all Honor Guard Association members in handling, transporting, firing, cleaning, inspecting, and storing rifles associated with rendering Military Funeral Honors (MFH) to deceased Veterans at the Saratoga National Cemetery. The information, policy and procedures contained herein serve as a tool in standardizing the performance of each Honor Guard Squad with regard to safe, knowledgeable and consistent rifle operations. This SOP does not address every possible action or contingent circumstance; however, does provide an overarching standard for preparing for, conducting and concluding rifle operations and protocols for MFH ceremonies on any given day. Observing and conducting safe rifle operations at all times while on cemetery grounds, whether written or implied within this SOP, is inherently incumbent on each Rifle Detail member. Since our Rifle Detail operates in close proximity to each other, Funeral Party attendees, other Squad members, and cemetery staff, constant personal vigilance and leaning forward to assist or advise other members to comply with defined protocols and procedures is strongly encouraged and supported.

APPLICABILITY: The policies, procedures and representations contained in this SOP apply to all Honor Guard Association members whether or not engaged with handling rifles at the Saratoga National Cemetery .

AUTHORITY: Compliance with this document is derived from approval of this SOP by the Saratoga National Cemetery Honor Guard Association elected leadership, implemented by the Commander on the date signed herein.

REFERENCES:

- A. Dept of Veterans Affairs Human Capital Management Letter No: 005-18-43F1, dated October 11, 2018, subject: “National Cemetery Administration Military Funeral Honors Safety”
- B. Section 578 of Public Law 106-65 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2000 on Jan. 1, 2000.
- C. Standard Operating Procedures – HG 3: Rendering Military Funeral Honors (MFH) - Policy and Procedures, dated October 1, 2019
- D. The Honor Guard Manual, dated 2011 by John K. Marshall, Drillmaster

ACRONYMS & DEFINITIONS:

CEMETERY-DESIGNATED FIRING LINE: Pre-Designated Area for the MFH Rifle Volley, depicted by a painted stripe in the cortege lane adjacent to each Committal Shelter. The Firing Line will accommodate a Rifle Detail consisting of as many as seven members, with up to a 6’ distance between each member, and is visible to all attendees within the Committal Shelter. The Firing Line is not accessible to pedestrian or vehicle traffic during the service (Reference A).

CEMETERY-DESIGNATED RIFLE SAFETY AREA (RSA): Pre-Designated Area for Rifle Detail to load and unload rifles, located north of the access road and

to the rear of each Committal Shelter. The RSA is not visible to the attendees within the Committal Shelter, and when in use, only members of the Rifle Detail are authorized to be present in this space.

Rifle Safe Area, Shelter #2



COMMITAL SHELTER: One of two designated facilities within the Saratoga National Cemetery dedicated to conducting MFH for deceased Veterans.

SARATOGA NATIONAL CEMETERY HONOR GUARD ASSOCIATION (SNC HGA): The designated and Department of Veterans Affairs approved volunteer organization, located in Schuylerville, New York, performing Military Funeral Honors at the Gerald B. H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery.

MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS (MFH): The DOD program for providing dignified military funeral honors at the Saratoga National Cemetery to Veterans who have defended our nation (Ref C). The service "...refers to the folding and

presentation of the American Flag, the playing of ‘Taps’, and/or the discharge of firearms (blanks) when a rifle volley is included.” (Ref B)

RIFLE DETAIL (RD): A component of each Honor Guard Squad, visible to the Funeral Party, performing a three-volley rifle salute in honor of the deceased Veteran during MFH.

RIFLE DETAIL LEADER (RDL): Squad member designated by the Squad Leader to organize and command the firing of three rifle volleys.

SARATOGA NATIONAL CEMETERY (SNC): Officially known as the Gerald B. H. Solomon National Cemetery located in Schuylerville, NY.

SHELL CASING COLLECTOR: Squad members designated to collect spent rifle shell casings following the three-volley salute by the Rifle Detail, normally after MFH have been concluded, under command of the Rifle Detail Leader.

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RELATED STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

CHAPTER 1: PRE-CEREMONY PROCEDURES & CHECKLIST

1. **Rifle Detail Leader (RDL), Squad Leader (SL)** or (his/her) Designees will open the Squad Room safe, conduct a rifle count to determine the total number of rifles in the safe and note total on the file card on the front of the safe.
2. Rifles are removed from the safe and each rifle will be handled accordingly:
 - a. Bolt opened, safety lever placed in the ON position, ensure chamber is empty and clean, and placed in the Squad Room rifle rack. If chamber is dirty, clean with solvent using a Q-tip.
 - b. Verify Blank Firing Adaptor (BFA) and Gas Cylinder Plugs are tight and record rifle number in the “Rifle Usage Log”.
 - c. Wipe rifles and clips with sanitary wipes by member wearing PPE gloves.
3. RDL or Designee will remove from the safe and maintain possession of the needed ammunition, a six-crimp cartridge (see Figure 1). No ammunition will be distributed to the **Rifle Detail (RD)** prior to departure to the Shelter.



Figure 1. Six Crimp Cartridges in Rifle Clip

RDL will ensure all RD members have hearing protection prior to departing Squad Room (Reference A).

CHAPTER 2: RIFLE TRANSPORT & ARRIVAL AT THE SHELTER

1. Squad members remove rifles from the Squad Room rifle rack **with bolts open, safety lever in the ON position** and transport to the bus rear door at PORT ARMS (Figure 2) or in the Cradle Carry position (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Rifle Detail (RD) transporting rifle at PORT ARMS



Figure 3. Rifle Detail (RD) transporting rifle in Cradle Carry Position

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2. RD members will (1) carry the rifle with the muzzle in an upward direction in both carry positions, and (2) must walk in a single file and not side- by-side.
3. The RDL or Designee inside the bus rear door receives the rifle, ensures bolts are open, chambers empty, safety lever in ON position, and secures each rifle in the rifle rack prior to transport.
4. Upon arrival at the Committal Shelter, RD members retrieve rifles through the bus rear door (Figure 4), receive a loaded clip from the RDL or Designee and proceed to the **Cemetery-Designated Rifle Safety Area (RSA)** (Figure 5).



Figure 4. Dispense and Retrieve Rifles through Bus Rear Door



Figure 5. Rifle Safety Area (RSA) with Rack at rear of Committal Shelter

5. Within the RSA, RD members line up facing the tree line away from the bus (Figure 6), **ensure safety lever is in the ON position** and load the rifle with blank ammunition clip.



Figure 6. RD Members Loading Rifles in RSA

6. When in possession of a rifle in proximity of the Committal Shelter, RD members always keep rifle pointed away from other personnel and remain within the RSA.
7. If a RD member leaves the RSA, place the rifle in the rack (see Figure 5) and ensure another Squad member accounts for the rifle.

8. When directed by the RDL to proceed to the Cemetery-Designated Firing Line, RD members will carry rifle at PORT ARMS or Cradle Carry position **with finger away from the trigger (Figure 7).**



Figure 7. Transporting Rifle with Finger Away From Trigger

CHAPTER 3: POST CEREMONY AT THE SHELTER

1. Following each MFH service, RD member ensures safety lever is returned to the safe position **and finger is kept away from the trigger** while marching from the Firing Line to the RSA.
2. RD members reload rifles within the RSA in compliance with Chapter 2, 5. (Figure 8).



Figure 8. RD Member Reloading Rifle in RSA

3. If the RD is going to have other ceremonies prior to returning to the squad room the rifles may be placed in the rifle rack within the RSA. If inclement weather is present, the rifles may be placed on the bus once RDL or Designee has checked to **ensure safety lever is in the ON position** and placed in the rifle racks.

4. If the RDL determines that the clips should be reloaded, the RD will wait to do so until the service is completed to avoid noise should a clip fall to the ground. Once the clips are loaded they may be placed back in the rifles following procedures in Chapter 2, 5.
5. Following the final MFH Service the RD returns to the RSA in compliance with paragraph 1 above. Within the RSA, RD member will remove the clip, open the bolt (Figure 9), ensure the chamber is clear, and **ensure safety lever is in the ON position.**



Figure 9. Rifle with Bolt Open

6. The RDL or Designee will conduct a final inspection of each rifle before loading into the VA bus rifle racks to ensure bolt is open, **safety lever is in the ON position** and chamber empty³.
7. All clips and ammunition will be returned to the RDL or Designee.

CHAPTER 4: RIFLE RETURN AND STORAGE

1. Upon arrival in the bus parking area, RDL or Designee hands rifles to awaiting Squad members through to VA bus rear door.
2. Squad members will transport the rifle to the Squad Room at PORT ARMS or in the Cradle Carry position **with finger away from the trigger**.
3. Upon entering the Squad Room, Squad member places rifle in the rifle rack.
4. RDL or Designee will don PPE gloves and wipe each rifle with sanitary wipes. The rifle is handed to RDL or Designee to ensure chamber is empty, close the bolt, pull the trigger to relieve spring tension, and placed in the safe, completing the safety protocol.
5. RDL or Designee conducts a final count of stored rifles to confirm total count from Chapter 1. Following the final count, RDL or Designee locks the Rifle Safe and the Ammunition Safe.
6. Squad Leader or Designee will note any observed defects, i.e., worn parts, etc., in Rifle Log.
7. Should any unintended rifle incident occur during the Squad's performance of MFH, the SL will prepare Attachment A – Unintended Rifle Incident (see Chapter 5) and follow guidance contained within the Form.

CHAPTER 5: UNINTENDED RIFLE INCIDENT

1. Should a Squad encounter an unintended rifle incident at any time while on the Cemetery grounds, the following initial procedures will be followed:
 - a. The Squad Leader, or in his/her absence (typical throughout), Assistant Squad Leader, may remove the individual responsible for the unintended rifle incident from the Rifle Detail immediately following the incident.
 - b. The Squad Leader/Assistant Squad Leader, in coordination with the RDL, will conduct interviews and document the incident as soon as possible, either on location of the incident or in the Squad Room.
 - c. Once the information is collated and documented, the Squad Leader/Assistant Squad Leader will complete the *Unintended Rifle Incident Report (Attachment A)*.
 - d. The Squad Leader/Assistant Squad Leader will forward the completed *Unintended Rifle Incident Report* to the designated parties as soon as practical, but not to exceed a twenty-four hours.
2. Within forty-eight hours of the unintended rifle discharge, the Squad Leader/Assistant Squad Leader and RDL will, if deemed necessary, conduct a follow-on interview with the member responsible for the unintended rifle incident, and may interview any witnesses to the incident.
3. The Squad Leader or Assistant Squad Leader, RDL, and **Rifle Safety Squad Member (RSS)** will then determine the appropriate course of action, identified below, for the individual involved in the incident:
 - a. The Squad RDL will recommend rifle operational and procedural training for the individual. Upon satisfactory execution of training, RDL will recommend reinstatement of the member to the Rifle Detail.

- b. Should the RDL determine that the individual will not satisfy operational proficiency through additional training, the RDL may recommend reassignment of the individual to the SL.
4. Retraining of the RD member responsible for the unintended rifle incident will be conducted under the supervision of the Squad's RDL and/or RSS member with oversight by the Squad Leader.
5. The Squad Leader will compile the information from paragraphs 3 & 4 above and forward a recommended course of action, accompanied by the *Unintended Rifle Incident Report*, to the HGA Commander for final disposition.
 - a. The Squad Leader's recommended action will suggest steps or procedures to ensure the specific incident, and similar actions, will not occur in the future.
 - b. The Report may identify recommendations, initiatives or observations relating to any other rifle operational procedures.
6. The HGA Commander will review and forward final disposition of the *Unintended Rifle Incident Report* and the Squad Leader actions in written report (email or correspondence) to the Cemetery Director and the Executive Committee within fourteen calendar days of the incident.
7. Any refinements or revisions to rifle operations and procedures agreed upon and approved by the Executive Committee will be prepared and inserted into this SOP in a timely manner.
8. A copy of the *Unintended Rifle Incident Report* and the Commander's final disposition will be maintained by the Adjutant and respective Squad Leader.

CHAPTER 6: TRAINING OF NEW RIFLE TEAM MEMBERS

1. Any new member of a rifle team must be trained consistent with SOP – HG 3 and SOP – HG 5 by the squad RDL and/or the Squad Safety Member. It is suggested that new rifle team members use the blank caps when learning to load clips with ammunition, loading the rifle with clips and removing the clips from the rifle.
2. When the RDL and /or the Squad Safety Member deem the new candidate proficient in safe handling of the rifle they will report to the Squad Leader that the new member is ready to be assigned to the rifle squad.
3. The new rifle team member may be added to the rifle squad once the Squad Leader gives approval.

CHAPTER 7: FUTURE REVISIONS AND COMPLIANCE

1. Squad Leaders may propose at any time recommended additions, alterations or deletions to this Standard Operating Procedure and forward to the Adjutant for dissemination to the HGA Squad Leaders, requesting their collective review and comment with a response deadline.
2. The Adjutant will collect responses from the Squad Leaders and forward any edits and recommendations back to the Squad Leaders with a response deadline.
3. The Squad Leaders will assess and forward final comments back to the Adjutant, who will then forward the recommended action to the Executive Committee for review and final action.
4. Upon approval of any modification to this SOP by the Executive Committee, the revisions will be inserted into this SOP for immediate compliance.

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- a. The revised SOP will show the revision number following the title, date of approval and include a brief narrative of the approved revisions on the front page.
5. The revised SOP will be disseminated to all Squad Leaders and RDLs for immediate compliance, and may include identified refresher training for the Rifle Details.
6. Squad Leaders, in concert with their RDL and RSS member, will consistently advocate and emphasize the significance of complying with all safety policies and procedures to their members, including a strong emphasis on mitigating any unsafe observed action at any time while on cemetery grounds.

RELATED STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES:

**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES - HG 3: RENDERING
MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS (MFH) - POLICY AND PROCEDURES**



Approved on _____, 2021.

Art Dutcher, Commander
Saratoga National Cemetery Honor Guard Association, Inc

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