



Veterans of Foreign Wars
of the
United States

Department of Texas
District 17

Chaplain's Guide

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CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special tribute to our Military Chaplains serving worldwide.

The contents of this Chaplain Guide were used from the following:

VFW Congressional Charter By-Laws: Article II, Sec. 230102, Post Level – Article II, Sec 216 – 218;

District Level – Article IV, Sec 416 – 418, Article VII, Sec 701.

Manual of Procedure: Post Level - Article II, Sec 217, 218a(7); District Level – Article IV, Sec 417, 418a(8).

VFW Ritual: Opening Post Ceremonies, Order of Business, Closing Ceremonies, Initiation Ceremony, Member's Obligation, Memorial Service, Chapel (Funeral) Service, VFW Burial Ritual, and Ceremony for Draping Charter.

Other material was obtained during my visits to the National Convention over the year and attending the National Chaplain's training session.

Again, this Chaplain Guide is provided to help our Post and District Chaplains across the Department of Texas and merely use as a teaching tool.

I would like to dedicate this Chaplain Guide to two of my mentors over the years: The late Rev. William B. Moody and Dr. Allen Lowe, MA, DMin. both of whom I learned how to be a Chaplain and service to others within the Community over the years.

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This Chaplain's Guide was designed and is to be used as a tool for Chaplain's at the POST and District levels. The following contents are written to help you with your duties as outlined in the VFW Rituals. The follow contents are dedicated to our military Chaplains who have served over the years.

THE ARMY: Chaplains had no role in the United States Army until 1791. However, colonial clergymen frequently raised military units from their own congregations and community, and often led them in battle, shouldering their muskets. The first appointed Army Chaplain was Rev. John Hurt in 1791. He had already served seven years during the Revolutionary War.

During the War of 1812, Chaplain James J. Wilmer was the only chaplain known to have died during this war. During the Civil War the Army Chaplaincy developed many procedures still in place. Most chaplains became less a "fighting parson", and more "spiritual" in their emphasis. The Civil War witnessed for the first time a large number of Roman Catholic chaplains in the field, the advent of the first Jewish Chaplains; and the first Black and Indian chaplains. Three Army chaplains were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The act of 1883 mandated that the chaplain should also "perform the duties of schoolmaster" at the Post. Additionally, chaplains generally held services in civilian settlements; established Indian congregations; officiated at functions; visited the sick, prisoners and soldiers in barracks; served at post gardeners; and, occasionally as legal counsel.

The period after the Spanish-American War saw not only the birth of the modern American Army, but also the birth of the modern chaplaincy. Between 1899 and 1920, the chaplaincy grew from an ill-organized adjunct of the Army into a small professional branch. The establishment of a school to train chaplains and the creation of the office of Chief of Chaplains did not take place until after World War I; however, the process by which the chaplaincy would evolve into an effective, professional branch of the Army had begun.

Today, the Army Chaplains, men and women clergy, continue to minister to the soldiers of the United States Army, National Guard, and Reserves, providing them with quality spiritual and moral guidance.

THE NAVY: The Navy Chaplaincy dates back to the Continental Navy. The critical event was when the Continental Congress adopted regulations which provided a place for religion and the chaplain in the Navy. Using the guidelines of the “Mother Country,” Divine Services were written into the Navy Regulations. However, few ships were authorized to be built and thus there were few Navy Chaplains. Rev. Benjamin Balch was the first chaplain known to have served in the Continental Navy.

From 1785 to 1798, there was no American Navy and, therefore, no Navy Chaplains. With a new edition of the Navy Regulations in 1802, additional duties of chaplains stated that they should “perform the duty of schoolmaster, instructing midshipmen...” The Navy Chaplain had to be a teacher of writing, mathematics, navigation, and whatever else they might need to make the men of the Navy proficient. This was in addition to his religious duties. That did not change much until 1906 when the Navy established certain guidelines that eliminated the teaching functions; established procedures and qualifications for Navy Chaplains; and established the Navy Chaplain Corps, including a Chief of Chaplains.

Navy Chaplains have served with distinction during all our wars and in time of peace. Navy Chaplains provide ministry to all the Sea Services, including the NAVY, MARINE CORPS, COAST GUARD, SEA BEES, and MERCHANT MARINE. He or she may wear many uniforms during their tours of duty.

THE AIR FORCE. Before 1939, the Army’s air arm was a fledgling organization. By the end of World War II, the Army Air Forces had become a major military organization comprised of many air forces, commands, divisions, wings, groups, and squadrons, plus an assortment of other organizations. The National Security Act of 1947 became law on 26 July 1947. It created the Department of the Air Force, headed by a Secretary of the Air Force. From this beginning grew the Air

Force Chaplaincy. On 10 May 1949, Transfer Order Number 35 allowed Army Chaplains to enter the new Air Force Chaplaincy. By 26 July, 458 active duty and 573 Reserve chaplains had made the change. Chaplain I. Carpenter became the first Chief of Air Force Chaplains. Air Force Chaplains received training at the Army Chaplain's school until they finally established their own school. As their counterparts in the Army and Navy, the Air Force Chaplains continue to provide ministry to their comrades during times of war and times of peace, providing spiritual and moral guidance to the Air Force family.

PURPOSE OF CORPORATION

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States – Purpose of Corporation, Congressional Charter, Article II, Section 203102 states that:

The purpose of this corporation shall be fraternal, patriotic, historical, charitable, and educational; to preserve and strengthen comradeship among its members; to assist worthy comrades; to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, and to assist their widows and orphans; to maintain true allegiance to the Government of the United States of America, and fidelity to its Constitution and laws; to foster true patriotism; to maintain and extend the institutions of American freedom, and to preserve and defend the United States from all her enemies, whomsoever.

HISTORY - THE CHAPLAINCY

The Chaplaincy has played an important role in the annals of military history. The term "Chaplain" comes from the fourth century story of St. Martin of Tours. As Martin and his men were returning from the battlefield in the middle of a severe winter, they met a shivering beggar at the gate of the city of Amiens. The

others passed by, ignoring the man, but Martin had compassion on the beggar. He cut his cloak in two parts and gave one to the beggar. That night Martin had a vision of Christ wearing the part given to the beggar. The part he had, known as the “cappa” was later kept in a shrine called “cappella”, becoming an object of veneration. French kings applied the term “chappelian”. Which meant “keepers of the cloak”, to those clergy who ministered to them. In years following, chaplains accompanied men who went to war.

Martin enraged Emperor Julian by saying, hitherto I have served you as a soldier; allow me now to become a soldier of God...” The Emperor later released him from the army. He was baptized and in 371, the people of Tours were so impressed by his holy life and miracles, made his Bishop by force.

In American military history, the origin of the chaplaincy dates from 29 July 1775 when the Continental Congress recognized the chaplaincy as being part of the Army. The chaplaincy now plays a significant role in all branches of the Armed Forces.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States have always recognized the importance of the spiritual life among our Comrades and its' Auxiliary. This Chaplain's Guide was developed to assist you in the performance of your duties and responsibilities as chaplains among their comrades and members of the auxiliary.

POST CHAPLAIN

You were elected to the office of POST Chaplain. You have an important responsibility to your POST. Whether you have been selected for your religious training or past VFW experiences, you are expected to be the spiritual advisor to your organization and its members.

Per the Manual of Procedure, Article II, Section 218 (7), The POST Chaplain shall be the Chairman of the Visiting Committee of the POST. He shall, with the assistance of such other members as may be appointed by the Commander, visit the sick and disabled members of the POST and make a report to the POST concerning the same. He shall perform such other duties as are usually incident to the office or as may from time to time be required of him by the laws and usages of this organization or lawful orders of proper authority.

PURPOSE OF CHAPLAINS

The office of Chaplains is not just to provide a “religious” officer to the organization to offer prayers at meetings. He has loftier purposes.

- 1) To help individuals grow in their relationship with God.
- 2) To help individuals grow in their relationship to one another and become a true comrade to one another.
- 3) To serve as a reminder of the transcendent in life.
- 4) To develop an environment with which comrades are encouraged in their personal and collective moral and spiritual growth.
- 5) To remind all Americans that God is the source of all rights and privileges.
- 6) To provide annual Memorial Service for the Post.
- 7) To prepare and present Suicide Awareness briefings for the Post.

We must be reminded that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is comprehensive in nature, embracing all religions and faith groups within its ranks. The Chaplaincy, being non-sectarian, must minister to the spiritual needs of all without regard to either affiliation or non-affiliation. Chaplains will need to provide ministry to people wherever there is a need.

QUALIFICATIONS OF CHAPLAINS

The qualifications for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States Chaplains are not academic or ecclesiastical. A Chaplain candidate is not required to be a “professional” clergy person (most POST Chaplains are not ordained). The qualifications are simple, yet important.

- 1) A willingness to serve the office.
- 2) A sense of spiritual maturity.
- 3) Committed to providing a Chaplain’s ministry.
- 4) A caring individual.
- 5) A desire to help others.
- 6) The ability to keep things confidential.
- 7) Willing to be neutral and objective when settling disputes.
- 8) Voice projection and the ability to read well in public.
- 9) Have a positive attitude toward himself.
- 10) Chaplains should be proud of their office and determined to do a good job.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHAPLAIN

- 1) In a non-sectarian manner, you should be prepared to listen to your fellow comrades and provide aid and spiritual comfort in times of stress, sickness, or bereavement.
- 2) Work with your Service Officer to aid members and their families in time of need.
- 3) Your POST Commander or other officers may come to you in confidence. Remember the privileged communication you are having is for your ears

- ONLY! Uphold the high ideals of the VFW in any advice that you may have to offer.
- 4) You should be prepared to offer the ritual prayers at each meeting of the POST. You will also be called upon to offer appropriate blessings at the initiation of new members; installation of officers; the dedication of a building, monument or colors; at the end of the special Commemorated Speeches or at the memorial service of a comrade. All such services are commemorated by use of the VFW ritual.
 - 5) Being a member of the POST Memorial Team will provide an opportunity for contact with the grieving family and thus provides a caring ministry to them.
 - 6) Use the persuasion of your office to promote harmony and unity in the POST home.

OPENING PRAYER FOR MEETINGS

O, Sovereign Ruler of the Universe who art the Lord of Hosts and God of Peace, without Thee our efforts are vain. Continue Thy blessings upon us and our families, we pray Thee, and guide use during our deliberations.

We beseech Thee, O God, to bless the departed comrades and to comfort all who gave their love ones to our nation's cause.

Bless and strengthen the sick, the needy and the afflicted. Bless, we ask Thee, the widows and children in our National Home and help us to fulfill our duty toward them.

Continue Thy favor upon our order, and help us to practice the spirit of true comradeship, both in our councils and with the world at large.

Enable us to better the community in which we live through our devotion to duty as citizens.

We now have a moment of silent prayer for our departed comrades and for those missing in action and those held as prisoners of war.

(short pause)

These and all other necessary blessing we ask of Thee, Mighty Ruler of the Universe. AMEN.

NATIONAL HOME PRAYER

Almighty God, we ask for Your divine blessing on the Children, families and staff of our National Home for Children in Easton Rapids, Michigan.

May Your Spirit dwell with them forever, giving them health and guiding their lives. Help us to always be faithful to our fallen comrades by providing (shelter and guidance) support for their families.

We ask in Your Holy Name. AMEN.

CLOSING PRAYER

Almighty God, the hour has come when we must part.

We commit ourselves to Thy Love. Thou, who art our strong tower of defense and our protection, grant that in life's battles we may be strong and brave, living such lives of stainless integrity as shall reflect honor upon our country and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, and glorify Thy great and Holy Name.

May Thy good providence shield us from all harm, watch over those who even now guard the gates of freedom, and bring us together again in true comradeship and peace. AMEN.

CEREMONIAL INITIATION

What you are about to experience has a purpose. Be on your guard at all times, for there are as many dangers in time of peace, and in private life, as there were in active service. When the danger seems greatest, or you feel discouraged, you will often find friends and receive assistance from unexpected quarters. Remember well your instructions, so that you may practice true comradeship which is the fundamental object of our order.

MEMBER'S OBLIGATION

In the presence of Almighty God – and the members of this order here assembled – I (*state your name*), do of my own free will and accord, solemnly promise and declare that: I will bear true allegiance – to the Constitution of the United States of America – and I will always be loyal thereto.

I do further solemnly promise and declare – that I will comply with the Congressional Charter – By-Laws and Rituals of this order – and I will always be loyal thereto – that I will never wrong or defraud this organization – nor a member thereof – nor permit any wrong to be done to either – if in my power to prevent it.

I will never propose for membership – any person not eligible - nor one whom I know to be unworthy.

I will never make known to anyone – authorized to receive it – any of the work of the order.

Should my affiliation – with the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States – cease in any way – I will consider this pledge – as

binding outside of the order – as though I had remained a member of the same.

All this I promise and pledge – upon the honor of a true comrade – and a citizen of our great Republic.

CEREMONIAL INITIATION PRAYER

Almighty God, we ask Thy blessing upon these our comrades who now become fellow members.

May the tender ties formed amid the privations and dangers of war be drawn closer by our fellowship in this order.

May our union foster among us an enduring comradeship and a spirit of mutual loyalty and support in every walk of life.

May these comrades dedicate and devote their lives to Thy service, and as Thou did spare them during the perils of wars, grant them henceforth they may be spared for a useful life, to the honor and glory of Thy Holy Name.

AMEN.

MEMORIAL SERVICE PREPARATION:

on the internet at: TX-VFW MEMORIAL SERVICES TRAINING VIDEO

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States VFW Ritual gives guidance for the Memorial service.¹ The date for the Memorial Service is not mandated by the Ritual although it should be conducted when the maximum comrades and Auxiliary are present.

This Service identifies and honors the most recent of our Comrades and Auxiliary members who have passed this year. Although it is a rather simple ceremony, one must be prepared. To be prepared, one must accomplish your responsibilities. If something is broken, missing, incomplete, or for any reason not accomplished – let it be known. Tell the Commander or Chaplain. Don't just stand there thinking no one will notice. When it is your time to speak, stand tall. Don not bend forward, the mic will pick up your voice. Speak slowly and clearly. There will be no salute except for the playing of taps.

The following is presented as a guide for the Commander and the Chaplain in the formation and presentation of the Memorial Service. There is no set pattern beyond the words printed in the Ritual. While elements from Post to National may vary, there are strong interactions of the elements which the Memorial Service must adhere.

The memorial Service cannot happen by accident. While it is not complicated, it is of meaningful to the Veteran and all connected with the VFW. While the Commander at every level is ultimately responsible for the Service, That Commander must utilize the talents of the staff. The primary source of talent for the Memorial Service is the Chaplain. The issue of most importance is the coordination between the Commander and the Chaplain.

There are times when the Memorial Service is conducted by the habits and mannerisms of times past. Some of these habits have become “solid” in the presentation and can alter the meaning of the event. It is here highly encouraged for the base of guidance to be the VFW Ritual. Deviation from this could result in the program not meeting the need or expectation of the VFW. Thus, the importance demanded between the Commander who is responsible and the Chaplain who will conduct the Service.

Not unlike any other event, the result is totally dependent upon the planning and preparation. If there is no plan, the most likely will be no result. And if there is no preparation, the result may be something other than what is

¹VFW Ritual, July 2018, “Memorial Service,” pp 74-78.

expected. Therefore, for this exercise, much time and effort will be put forward in the planning of the Memorial Service.

There are possible additions that can be included – but not required – by the ritual.

Singing of “Sleep Soldier Boy” presented following the Chaplain of the Auxiliary
Voicing of “Flounders Field.”

There can be a short message by the Chaplain or a guest speaker which must be coordinated. Following this short message, the Chaplain voices the benediction, a moment of silence, and the playing of taps.

PREPARATION:

1. The date, time, and location of the event is determined by the commander.

This information is given to subordinate elements including,

- Commander.
- Chief of Staff / Officer of the Day.
- Chaplain.
- Senior Vice Commander.
- Junior Vice Commander.
- Past Commander (the manual does not identify “past”.)
- President of Auxiliary.
- Chaplain of Auxiliary.
- Bugler
- Dress Code, Uniform of the Day.
- Date, time, location of rehearsal

Host Location: (Responsibilities)

NOTE: The host element may have specific activities, events, bulletin, additional speaker used at their location. These specific activities must be coordinated with the Commander, and not simply be implied and put into the program at the date of presentation.

- Set up auditorium for Memorial including,
- Properly set table with Maltese Cross, Cross, Opened Bible, American Flag, VFW Flag, Texas Flag (optional).
- Properly set a separate table for POW/MIA with white candle.
- Have at the designated location on the date of the Memorial:
- Red Flowers – Chaplain.
- White Flowers – Past Commander.

- Blue Flowers – Commander.
- Wreath – President of the Auxiliary.

NOTE: The flowers may be placed on the alter by the individual making the memorial or by another; perhaps the Chief of Staff or Officer of the Day. This individual must be identified at the time of the rehearsal

NOTE: Each element of VFW or Auxiliary must report to the Host Element the number of VFW Comrades and Auxiliary members who died in the past year. This report must be given to the Host Element and to the Chaplain to be placed in the Program book. This individual must be identified prior to the date of the ceremony.

NOTE: Prior to the Memorial Service, the Commander may want to remind those in the audience to remain uncovered and remain silence throughout the Ceremony.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

COMMANDER: Comrades, Members of the Auxiliary and friends, we meet at this time to commemorate our comrades of the United States Armed Forces who have answered the last call.

The VFW Ritual provides that the audience shall refrain from applauding. The Officer-of-the-Day will see that there is no disturbance during the ceremonies.

OFFICER-OF-THE-DAY: Commander, your orders will be obeyed.

COMMANDER: I request that the Chaplain preside.

CHAPLAIN: Comrade Commander, I am at your service and shall endeavor to perform this solemn duty in the spirit of faith, hope and charity.

(Chaplain take station of the Commander)

CHAPLAIN: At this time, we will have a roll call of the POST HOME number of deceased comrades and the number of deceased Auxiliary members.

(POST Commander and President of the Auxiliary approaches the Alter)

CHAPLAIN: Will all please be seated. We will now have the lighting of the POW/MIA candle and the Armed Forces Vigil candle by the Commander and President of the Auxiliary.

(The Commander and President of the Auxiliary together will light the two appropriate candles on the altar escorted by the Sergeant-at-Arms, and return to their seats.) (The Chaplain delivers a prayer for the POW/MIA's and a "Prayer of Gratitude" for those serving in harm's way.)

PRAYER

CHAPLAIN: O God Almighty, Creator and Ruler of the Universe, some of our comrades and companions are prisoners of war and missing in action. Comfort them, we pray, in their isolation from their homes and love ones, supply their needs and protect them from want and deprivation; strengthen and sustain them that they may face discouragement with courage and hardship with resolution. Grant

that they may find patience to endure, and peace in the knowledge of Your continuing presence.

O God, we ask that You will strengthen and protect all our members of the armed forces of the United States of America. In the day of battle may they be courageous and strong, resourceful and capable, resolute and victorious. In the time of peace may they serve with dignity and honor, as effective emissaries of good will for this Nation. May their devotion and loyalty to You and to their homeland inspire them in a moment of challenge, and comfort them in tribulation and long separations from loved one.

And finally, we ask they may return safely to serve You and our Country in the days and years to come.

AMEN.

CHAPLAIN: Comrades and friends, join in singing “Nearer, My God to Thee.”

SINGING TOGETHER

CHAPLAIN: Comrade Commander, to whom should the true soldier look for help in the battles of life?

COMMANDER: “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

CHAPLAIN: Comrade Senior Vice Commander, what assurance have we of a prolonged stay among the scenes and activities of earth?

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER: “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers; our days on earth and as a shadow, and there is none abiding.”

CHAPLAIN: Comrade Junior Vice Commander, have you a message of condolence for those bereaved?

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER: I have. The Book of Life tell us that “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.”

CHAPLAIN: What message has the Chaplain of the Auxiliary?

CHAPLAIN OF THE AUXILIARY: I have a message of hope that should inspire our comrades at this solemn moment and all through life. The message is from the Captain of our Salvation. He says: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

CHAPLAIN: Comrades, we are thankful for these inspiring thoughts. Let us learn the lesson of the hour which is that we, too, are nearing the end of life's pilgrimage and sooner or later these services may be held in our memory.

Let us so live what when our summons comes, we may depart with a good conscience, in the comfort of a sincere religion, belief in God, and

perfect charity towards all mankind. Let us pray.

PRAYER

CHAPLAIN: Father of us all! In the depth of our silent reverence, we realize the truth of the inspired words, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." As comrade after comrade departs, we march on with our ranks grows thinner. Help us to be faithful unto You and to one another. Look in mercy on the widows, and children of our departed comrades, we beseech You, and with Your own tenderness, console and comfort those who are bereaved. Heavenly Father, bless our Country with freedom, peace, and righteousness. Through Your favor may we meet at last before

Your throne in Heaven. We praise Your Great Name forever and ever always.

AMEN.

MUSIC – “Sleep Soldier Boy” (optional)

CHAPLAIN: Comrades, in commemorating the virtues of our departed heroes who served their country in time of need we now offer our symbolic tributes.

I place upon our sacred shrine these red flowers which symbolize the zeal of our departed comrades in upholding brotherhood, truth and justice.

(Places red flowers)

CHAPLAIN: Comrade PAST Commander, what tribute have you to offer?

PAST COMMANDER: The white flowers I place as a token of the purity of affection we have for our departed comrades.

(Places white flowers)

CHAPLAIN: Comrade Commander, have you a tribute to offer upon this sacred shrine?

COMMANDER: The blue of our national standard symbolizes truth and fidelity. Therefore, I place these blue flowers from nature's bosom in token of our sincere respect for all departed comrades.

(Place blue flowers)

CHAPLAIN: Members of the Auxiliary, will you offer a tribute to the memory of our departed comrades?

PRESIDENT OF THE AUXILIARY: I place upon our sacred shrine this wreath as symbol of eternity. Its color bespeaks life everlasting. Thus, do we say that the deeds of our soldiers, marines, sailors, and airmen, on land, at sea, and in the air, are immortalized in the hearts of grateful people.

(Places evergreen wreath)

CHAPLAIN: Let us rise and sing “America”.

SINGING TOGETHER

CHAPLAIN: We will close the Memorial Service at this time with the benediction.

PRAYER

CHAPLAIN: Lord, we humble thyself unto You. May You guide and lead our District and POST Homes in the upmost righteous ways to only please You Lord. You are our Lord of Lord, King of all Kings. Watch over our men and women in uniform throughout this great land, the deep waters of the seas, the airways to continue protecting our Nation. Watch over our uniformed while they are serving in harms' way overseas on unfamiliar soil. Bring them back safe and those whom are lost, help us O God to bring that member home and pay homage and respect. All this we seek from You and asking Your blessing we go through life's battles.

In Christ most Holy Name, I pray thee. AMEN.

CHAPLAIN: We will now have a moment of silence followed by TAPS.

TAPS BEING PLAYED

CHAPLAIN: Comrades and Members of the Auxiliary, this concludes the Memorial Services and I turn the program back over the Commander.

FUNERAL CEREMONIES

The following VFW funeral chapel action at the casket of a departed comrade may be used if the family of the deceased requests that such final rites be performed. Arrangements should be made beforehand with the funeral director and officiating minister.

Before the services begin, place a staffed Flag of the United States to the left of the chapel rostrum (left as those assembled face the casket) and the VFW colors to the right of the rostrum.

The casket is covered by a Flag of the United States laid in reverse position – with the blue field over the heart of the deceased.

When the services start, (*in this order*) the Junior Vice Commander, Senior Vice Commander, Officer of the Day, Commander, and Chaplain are seated in the front row.

These five members should be dressed in full uniform (Blues and Greys) They wear the VFW Cap except during prayer. They have a symbol of the stations they occupy.

Junior Vice Commander...**Sprig of evergreen**

Senior Vice Commander...**a white flower(s)**

Officer of the Day.....**a laurel wreath**

Commander...**a small *Flag* of the United States**

At the moment arranged for the VFW ceremony, preferably following the religious

service by the minister, priest, or rabbi, the VFW officers rise and march in single file to the rostrum. All movement should be executed in precise, military, orderly manner.

The officers stand facing the assembly, before or near the casket. Those assembled see, left to right, Junior Vice Commander, Senior Vice Commander, Officer of the Day, Commander, and Chaplain.

COMMANDER: We, the members of _____ POST Number _____, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States are here assembled to pay a lasting tribute of respect to our departed comrade. When the call of our county was heard, Comrade _____ (*deceased*) _____ answered; self was forgotten in the cause of the greater good. As a

brave man he marched away with the abiding faith in God, his county and his flag.

The red of our country's flag was made redder by his heroism; the white more stainlessly pure by the motives which impelled him; and the starry field of our nation's glorious banner, the blue has been glorified by the service he has giving for American ideals.

Parade Rest!

The Chaplain will invoke the Divine blessing.

Uncover!

PRAYER

CHAPLAIN: O God, Father of us all, we here extend these final earthly tributes to our beloved comrade. Accept our prayers in behalf of the soul of Thy servant departed. Welcome him to Thy house to rest in peace. Comfort and console them through Thine own tenderness. These things we ask humbly in Thy name.

AMEN.

COMMANDER: One by one, as the years roll on, we are called upon to fulfill these sad duties of respect to our departed comrade.

Attention Officers of _____
POST Number _____, Veterans of Foreign

Wars of the United States, you will now perform the last duties of your stations.

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER: (*Faces casket, approaches it, stands before blue field of the casket flag in such position that his back is not toward the assembly. He folds back the corner of the flag to leave a bare portion of the casket. Then he places the **evergreen** upon the casket and declares so all hear*):

On behalf of _____, POST Number _____, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, I present this **evergreen** tribute as a symbol of our undying love for our comrade.

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER *salutes casket and returns to his place in line.*)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER: (*Faces casket, approaches it, stands before blue field of the casket flag in such position that his back is not toward the assembly. Laying a **white flower(s)** upon casket, he says):*

I place these **white flower(s)** as a symbol of purity upon this casket, and may each future generation emulate the unselfish devotion to duty even to the last of our comrades.

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER *salutes casket and returns to his place in line.)*

OFFICER OF THE DAY: (*Faces casket, approaches it, stands before blue field of the casket flag in such position that his back is not*

toward the assembly. Laying a **laurel wreath** upon casket, he says):

We place this **laurel wreath** as a last token of affection from his comrades-in-arms upon the casket of our departed comrade and crown his mortal dust with this symbol of victory.

OFFICER OF THE DAY *salutes casket and returns to his place in line.*

COMMANDER: (*Faces casket, approaches it, stands before blue field of the casket flag in such position that his back is not toward the assembly. Laying a **small flag** upon casket, he says):*

On behalf of our glorious republic, for whose integrity our comrades of the Veterans of Foreign Wars enlisted and served, we place upon his casket this emblem of our country, a country whose arms are always open to shelter the oppressed.

COMMANDER: *Then replaces folded corner of the casket flag, laying it over the **evergreen, white flower(s), laurel wreath, and flag symbols.** Commander salutes and returns to his place in line.*

CHAPLAIN: We come today to honor the memory of one who offered his/her life as a service to our Nation's cause and to our God. Proudly we remember his/her service. Because of men and women like our comrade, we live in a land of freedom, peace, and justice. May our

ceremonies of today deepen our reverence for our honored comrade and friend.

We believe that our comrade is now in the hands of our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Commander and Judge of all. We lay our comrade's body (or ashes) to rest. Let us cherish his virtues and learn to imitate them. Let each of us be loyal and faithful to our remaining missions in life that we too will be able to join in that grand fraternity which is on earth and in heaven, and remains unbroken.

We realize how futile mere words are to express our deep and abiding sympathy in our loss. May we be comforted by the assurance that our comrade, friend, and loved one is at rest in God's eternal peace, and abides in a

place where all burdens are lifted and there is no more sickness and pain.

Comrades, let us now pledge ourselves anew to provide support and protection for those left behind; to pick up the banner laid down by our comrade, and continue his march to face the challenges that confronts us in this life, and may our God always be our companion and guide.

COMMANDER: This concludes our service.

VFW BURIAL RITUAL

Unless the deceased veteran was an active member of the VFW, the symbolic evergreen, flower, wreath, and flag will not be used.

COMMANDER: *Attention!* We are here assembled to pay a lasting tribute of respect to our departed comrade.

When the call of our country was heard, Comrade _____ (name of deceased) _____ answered; self was forgotten in the cause of the greater good. As a brave man he marched away with an abiding faith in his God, his country and his flag.

The red of our country's flag was made redder still by his heroism; the white more stainlessly pure by the motives which impelled him; and, in starry field of our nation's glorious banner, the blue has been glorified by the service he has given for American ideals.

Parade rest!

The Chaplain will invoke the Divine Blessing.

PRAYER

CHAPLAIN: Almighty and Merciful God! Father of all, in the midst of these moments of the dead we see Your hand of mercy.

In the depth of our sorrow, we realize the truth of the inspired words: “I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” As comrade after comrade departs this life, we march on with the ranks growing thinner.

Help us to be faithful to You in mercy upon all of us here assembled and, with Your compassion and tenderness, console and comfort those bereaved by the hand of death. Give them the “oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Heavenly Father bless our Nation with freedom, peace and righteousness, and through Your Sovereign and Holy Spirit’s favor, may we all meet at last before Your throne of Grace in

Heaven. And to Your Great Name shall be
praise forever and forever.

AMEN.

“Sleep, Soldier Boy” or an appropriate hymn
may be sung.

COMMANDER: One by one, as the years roll
on, we are called upon to fulfill these sad duties
of respect to our departed comrade.

Attention Officers of _____
POST Number _____, Veterans of Foreign
Wars of the United States, you will now
perform the last duties of your stations.

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER: (*Faces casket, approaches it, stands before blue field of the casket flag in such position that his back is not toward the assembly. He folds back the corner of the flag to leave a bare portion of the casket. Then he places the **evergreen** upon the casket and declares so all hear*):

On behalf of _____, POST
Number _____, Veterans of Foreign Wars of
the United States, I present this **evergreen**
tribute as a symbol of our undying love for our
comrade.

JUNIOR VICE COMMANDER *salutes casket and returns to his place in line.*)

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER: (*Faces casket, approaches it, stands before blue field of the*

*casket flag in such position that his back is not toward the assembly. Laying a **white flower**(s) upon casket, he says):*

I place these **white flower**(s) as a symbol of purity upon this casket, and may each future generation emulate the unselfish devotion to duty even to the last of our comrades.

SENIOR VICE COMMANDER *salutes casket and returns to his place in line.)*

OFFICER OF THE DAY: *(Faces casket, approaches it, stands before blue field of the casket flag in such position that his back is not toward the assembly. Laying a **laurel wreath** upon casket, he says):*

We place this **laurel wreath** as a last token of affection from his comrades-in-arms upon the casket of our departed comrade and crown his mortal dust with this symbol of victory.

OFFICER OF THE DAY *salutes casket and returns to his place in line.*

COMMANDER: (*Faces casket, approaches it, stands before blue field of the casket flag in such position that his back is not toward the assembly. Laying a **small flag** upon casket, he says*):

On behalf of our glorious republic, for whose integrity our comrades of the Veterans of Foreign Wars enlisted and served, we place upon his casket this emblem of our country, a

country whose arms are always open to shelter the oppressed.

COMMANDER: *Then replaces folded corner of the casket flag, laying it over the **evergreen, white flower(s), laurel wreath, and flag symbols.** Commander salutes and returns to his place in line.*

CHAPLAIN: *We come today to honor the memory of one who offered his/her life as a service to our Nation's cause and to our God. Proudly we remember his/her service. Because of men and women like our comrade, we live in a land of freedom, peace, and justice. May our ceremonies of today deepen our reverence for our honored comrade and friend.*

We believe that our comrade is now in the hands of our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Commander and Judge of all. We lay our comrade's body (or ashes) to rest. Let us cherish his virtues and learn to imitate them. Let each of us be loyal and faithful to our remaining missions in life that we too will be able to join in that grand fraternity which is on earth and in heaven, and remains unbroken.

We realize how futile mere words are to express our deep and abiding sympathy in our loss. May we be comforted by the assurance that our comrade, friend, and loved one is at rest in God's eternal peace, and abides in a place where all burdens are lifted and there is no more sickness and pain.

Comrades, let us now pledge ourselves anew to provide support and protection for those left behind; to pick up the banner laid down by our comrade, and continue his march to face the challenges that confronts us in this life, and may our God always be our companion and guide.

CHAPLAIN: *Benediction* – May the blessing and benediction of heaven be upon us and our comrade wherever dispersed the world over.

AMEN.

COMMANDER: This concludes our service.

CEREMONY FOR DRAPING CHARTER

After motion from floor, or Commander request ceremony:

COMMANDER: Officer of the Day, you will obtain drape in preparation for draping charter.

OFFICER OF THE DAY: *Obtains drape, proceeds to the altar and salutes Commander.*

COMMANDER: *(Raps gavel twice) Members rise and face charter at attention.*

COMMANDER: Officer of the Day, you will now drape our charter in memory of our beloved Comrade _____ who has passed on.

OFFICER OF THE DAY: *Proceeds to charter and drapes charter.*

COMMANDER: By so doing, we as members of _____ POST Number _____ offer solemn tribute to our departed comrade.

OFFICER OF THE DAY: *Returns to the alter. Salutes Commander. Retires to station.*

COMMANDER: *Comrades, Salute – Two.*

COMMANDER: *Comrade Chaplain (Comrades, Parade rest.)*

CHAPLAIN: Eternal God, let Your mercy rest upon us as we, with grateful affection, remember Comrade _____ (deceased) _____, who has departed this life. We thank You for their days upon earth and the joy that they brought. May our remembrance of them live long among us and be to us a source of guidance and strength. Give to those who miss them most deeply, wells of consolation from which to draw comfort, and enable us to be Your ministers of mercy to them in their time of need.

AMEN.

NOTE. VFW 62nd National Convention, Resolution 183, mandate provides that – “charters should be draped for 30 days for all deceased comrades.” After the 30 days an

Undraping of the Charter ceremony may be performed:

After motion from floor, or Commander request ceremony.

COMMANDER: Officer of the Day, you will prepare to undrape the charter.

OFFICER OF THE DAY: *Obtains drape, proceeds to the altar and salutes Commander.*

COMMANDER: *(Raps gavel twice) Members rise and face charter at attention.*

COMMANDER: Officer of the Day, you will now undrape our charter which was draped last month for Comrade _____.

OFFICER OF THE DAY: *Proceeds to undrape charter.*

COMMANDER: Comrades, *Salute – Two.*

SUICIDE AWARENESS TRAINING

Suicide is the termination of ones living administered by that individual.

The suicide rate of the US Veteran has risen and continues to rise. The numbers are also relevant and related to the individual or organization making the statement. In my research I discovered one specific, unique and consistent issue, specifically focused on the Veteran of the US Military, “Nobody really knows why suicide rates continue to climb.” This comment made by Craig Bryan, PsyD, Executive Director of National Center for Veterans Studies at the University of Utah.

So, when someone stands before you or authors a paper telling you numbers and reasons for military suicide, nod your head and realize that the actual number and cause of raising is unknown.

Some will with determination blame demographics – 809% of the military is male and the male is more violent than the female. Men kill themselves more often than women. However, the female veteran will die by a higher rate than non-veteran or non-service members.

There are other factors which get the blame including insomnia, depression, anxiety, sexual victimization, gun ownership, substance abuse AND older veterans may also be coping with aging, stress, lingering effects stemming from military service.

Everyone may have their opinion and strongly hold to it, but of the articles I read, the only consistent observation was that the suicide rates continue to rise and nobody really knows why.

Here is the SO WHAT! WHAT SHOULD/COULD I BE DOING?

Generally speaking, VFW Posts have less than a 50% of membership attendance at the Post meeting – and that probably holds true with District. My personal recommendation is that each Post set a goal of visiting ALL members at least twice a year. And while you visit your comrades, talk! And in your talking, listen. Your comrade may give you a warning sign of suicide. Not everyone will give a warning of suicide; not everyone is a suicide candidate. Just visit and listen. A warning sign must be taken seriously – even if that comrade may seem to be joking.

So, for the next few minutes, I will share with you some of the warning signs of suicide. If you see any of these signs in yourself or another, reach out for assistance.

Everyone should have the

SUICIDE AWARENESS: FACTORS, SYMPTOMS, WARNING SIGNS.

If you recognize any of the following signs in yourself or others, you should reach out for support:

- FEELING HOPELESS
- FEELING ANXIOUS
- FEELING NO REASON TO LIVE
- FEELING RAGE
- RISKY ACTIVITIES
- ALCOHOL, SUBSTANCE MISUSE
- WITHDRAWAL

The following signs require ***immediate*** attention.

- PLAN
- TALKING, WRITING, DRAWING ABOUT DEATH
- RECKLESS, ENGAGE RISKY ACTIVITIES
- VIOLENT BEHAVIOR
- RAGE UNCONTROLLED ANGER
- DEATH WISH
- GIVING AWAY PRIZED POSSESSIONS

VETERANS

CRISIS LINE:

1-800-273-8255

Press Option 1

Or **TEXT**: 838255

