



Minnesota LEMA Honor Guard 21 Gun Salute vs. Three Volley Salute

The **3-volley salute** is a ceremonial act performed at military and police funerals as part of the drill and ceremony of the Honor Guard. It consists of a rifle party firing blank cartridges into the air three times. The custom originates from the European dynastic wars, where the fighting ceased so the dead and wounded could be removed. Then, three shots were fired into the air to signal that the battle could resume. This continued up to the American Civil War.

The Army's Field Manual (FM 3-21.5) states a rifle party can have as few as five and as many as eight. Typically we will commit seven members to the Firing Party plus the Firing Party Commander. The firearm used is typically a rifle, but at some police funerals, shotguns or handguns are used. The party usually stands so that the muzzles are pointed over the casket. However if mourners are present near the grave, the party stands some distance away (often recommended at least 50 feet) so as to not deafen the attendees and minimize the disturbance. If the service is being performed indoors, the firing party stands outside the building, often near the front entrance. On the command of the officer-in-charge, the party raises their weapons and fires three times in unison.

Modern United States military and police firing parties use M1, M14 or M16 rifles. The use of blank cartridges means these weapon's semi-automatic gas action will not function, requiring manual cycling of the next round between shots. Some parties equip the rifle with a blank-firing adapter, which eliminates this step from the drill after the first shot, though this is seen by some as less traditional. Similarly, the M1 and M14 are generally preferred over the current issue M16 because the appearance of these older rifles is more traditional and the charging handles are more easily operated in a dignified, ceremonial manner.

The **three-volley salute** is not to be confused with the **21-gun salute** (or 19-gun or 17-gun, etc.) which uses a battery of artillery pieces.

Gun salutes are the firing of cannons or firearms as a military or naval honor. Most civilian media consider the three-volley salute to be a 21-gun salute after they see the seven firing party members and multiply that by the number of times fired (three) and come up with a 21-Gun Salute.

The custom stems from naval tradition, where a warship would fire its cannons harmlessly out to sea, until all ammunition was spent, to show that it was disarmed, signifying the lack of hostile intent. As naval customs evolved, 21 volleys came to be fired for heads of state, with the number decreasing with the rank of the recipient of the honor. While the 21-gun salute is the most commonly recognized, the number of rounds fired in any given salute will vary depending on the conditions. Circumstances affecting these variations include the particular occasion and, in the case of military and state funerals, the branch of service, and rank (or office) of the person to whom honors are being rendered.