

Memorial Day -

Just another day off from school or does it mean something?

Isn't Memorial Day the day that we say, "Thank you for your service," to people who are or were in the military? No, it is not. Many people confuse that. Thanking a veteran is something we do on Veteran's Day in November. So, what do we say if we see someone standing over the grave of someone who has passed? We tell them that we are sorry for their loss.

Memorial Day is not just another day off from school, it is a day that we remember those that lost their lives while fighting for the continued freedoms of our country. It is a solemn day when we remind ourselves that thousands of people died while serving our country in the Air Force, Army, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard. Did you know that at the present time, Americans are still fighting a war in Iraq and Afghanistan? We still have people giving the ultimate sacrifice of their lives for us and our country. It is still happening



One of the most famous cemeteries in our country is Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Va. Most of the graves there hold the remains of very brave Americans who gave their lives to keep us or another country free and safe. These heroes and veterans are interred with the very highest military honors. A musician plays "Taps" on a bugle, there are 7 Honor Guards that shoot their rifles 3 times, giving a 21 gun salute. That is an extremely high honor. The casket is draped with the American Flag and is ceremoniously folded with exactly 13 folds, creating a triangle. The flag is presented to the friend or family member closest to the person that died.



Within the cemetery in Arlington, there is a very special area known as The Tomb of the Unknowns. It is a very sacred space. The military guard at the [Tomb of the Unknown Soldier](#) is changed in an elaborate ceremony which happens every hour on the hour from October 1 through March 31, and every half hour from April 1 through September 30.

Twenty-four hours a day, soldiers from the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, known as "The Old Guard," stand

watch over the Tomb. The Tomb Guards, also called Sentinels, are chosen for this prestigious and highly selective post only after rigorous training and a demanding series of examinations .

The Old Guard has held this distinguished duty since 1948. An impeccably uniformed relief commander appears on the plaza to announce the changing of the guard. Soon, the new Sentinel leaves the Tomb Guard quarters and unlocks the bolt of his or her M-14 rifle, signaling to the relief commander to begin the ceremony. The relief commander walks out to the Tomb and salutes, then faces the spectators and asks them to stand and remain silent during the ceremony.



The relief commander conducts a detailed white-glove inspection of the weapon, checking each part of the rifle once. Then, the relief commander and the relieving Sentinel meet the retiring Sentinel at the center of the black mat in front of the Tomb. All three salute the Unknown Soldiers who have symbolically been given the Medal of Honor. The relief commander orders the relieved

Sentinel, "Pass on your orders." The current Sentinel commands, "Post and orders, remain as directed." The newly posted Sentinel replies, "Orders acknowledged," and steps into position on the mat. When the relief commander passes, the new Sentinel begins walking at a cadence of 90 steps per minute.

The Tomb Guard marches exactly 21 steps down the black mat behind the Tomb, turns, faces east for 21 seconds, turns and faces north for 21 seconds, then takes 21 steps down the mat and repeats the process. (The number 21 symbolizes the highest military honor that can be bestowed, the [21-gun salute](#).) Next, the Sentinel executes a sharp "shoulder-arms" movement to place the weapon on the shoulder closest to the visitors, signifying that he or she stands between the Tomb and any possible threat.

When not "walking," the Tomb Guards spend their duty time in quarters below the Memorial Display Room of the [Memorial Amphitheater](#), where they study cemetery history, clean their weapons and help the rest of their relief prepare for the changing of the guard. As you will see in the following video, everything is absolutely perfect with the rifle and the sentinel before he is allowed to stand guard.

<https://safeYouTube.net/w/JtJG>

Just before Memorial Day, the "Old Guard Soldiers" and in previous years, volunteers, place a flag at every one of the graves of the heroes at Arlington. At Christmas time, they, along with volunteers place a wreath at each grave. These people who gave their lives are true heroes. They don't wear capes, they wear combat boots and dog tags. Watch as the soldiers meticulously place the flags at each grave.

<https://safeYouTube.net/w/COJG>

So, how can you honor those that gave their lives for our freedom? Few people remember that our Nation is asked to have a moment of silence at 3:00 p.m. on Memorial Day. You can easily do that. While you are silent, think about those that gave their lives but also for the friends and family that have lost someone they loved. It must be very difficult for them. Also, if you visit a cemetery, and see someone grieving over a grave, remember to say, "I'm sorry for your loss."