## I. Basic Requirements

## A Special Salute

E. Drum Funeral Home in Conover, North Carolina, proudly salutes all military personnel: men and women, past or present, active or reserve, who've sacrificed their lives in defense of our country.

Our mortuary firm is accustomed to providing military funerals; however, it is our goal to give a "personal tribute" to the families of the military personnel or veterans. Our personalization consists of the following areas:

When conducting a military funeral, our directors place seals of the specific branch of military for which the deceased served on the side doors of the coach which carries the veteran to his or her final resting place.

As the funeral procession arrives at the cemetery, family and friends find that our personnel has lined the walkway with small American flags. These stay in place during the graveside service. As family and friends depart, they may take a flag as a token of appreciation for their loved one's participation in the United States Armed Services.

Drum Funeral Home is most privileged to have American Legion Post #16 volunteer their time in order to provide full military honors with graveside rites for all veterans.

Our funeral home schedules Rev. Dr. Stephen Ray, a local Methodist minister and professional bugler, to play "Taps" at the conclusion of the graveside service.

His performance is provided to each veteran at no additional charge. This allows a time of reflection for family and friends.

Another additional service provided to families whose loved one has been killed in the active line of duty is a no cost funeral service.

Along with the military seals on the coach, the American flag-lined walkway, the dignity of the American Legion's military honors and the somber playing of "Taps," we at Drum Funeral Home extend "A Special Salute" to all military personnel.

At Kingston & Kemp Funeral Home our staff has served many veterans and their families. We have arranged veteran's burials in the Greenwood Cemetery Field of Honor and the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Memorial Cemetery and at the Beverly National Cemetery, and the ultimate honor, Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington Virginia. Until now the staff has never handled an active Soldiers death during a war.

The funeral and death of a serviceman. Rumors about the death of Pfc. Eric R. Wilkus, were going around the neighborhood and through the White Horse Fire Co. on December 26, 2006, that Eric had died on Christmas day in Landstuhl, Germany. Eric was serving with the Army 57<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company in Iraq. His parents Walter and Sharon were in Germany at the time that Eric passed. His body was prepared by Mary Ellen Spera, an officer at the US Army Mortuary in Landstuhl Germany. It took his parents several more days to return home and confirm that the rumors were true. I was conducting a funeral on December 29, 2006, when I was paged to call a Sgt. Mel in Germany regarding the death of Eric. Before finishing the graveside services his father had called as well to set up the funeral services. I immediately called Gary Szabo one of our directors, to assist me with the logistics of the funeral and appointed him public relations director.

Directors Gary Szabo and Shawn Kingston met with Eric's father Walt in the office to start the task of organizing this tragic and massive funeral. Ed Relak a retired Prison guard and friend of the family was present as their personal family representative, he assisted with visitors, press and needs at the residence. Gary then returned the telephone call to Germany, and spoke to Sgt. Mel in regards to the flight information. He was also in contact with officers in Hawaii and Iraq.

Eric's casketed body arrived at the Philadelphia International Airport in Philadelphia PA, on December 29, 2006 at 10:45 PM on Delta Airlines. Eric's father Walt and Brother Frank and several members of the White Horse Fire Co wanted to be present at the airport when the flight arrived. We went to Delta Air Cargo and meet MSG. Richard Sudhoff, Directorate of Logistics from Ft. Dix. He was there to meet the Army escort who had accompanied Eric's body from Germany, and was present through the entire funeral process. A representative of Delta arrived and let us in to process the paper work. I made the decision to remove Eric's casket from the shipping tray, so it appeared more dignified. Directors Kingston & Szabo along with the firemen carried the casket to the hearse. We returned home at 12:15 AM.

We were looking at seven funerals in seven days during the holidays. The next day we had two services, and Gary spent the whole day making contacts and returning phone calls from organizations wishing to attend the services. He posted a list of local hotels, driving directions and funeral schedule on our web site. We found out that The Westboro Baptist Church was planning on picketing our services. This group has protested at many military funerals during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Ed Relak called to inform us that the Patriot Guard Riders (which Eric's father is a member) would be attending the services to protect the family from the protesters. Also attending were The Red Knights, a fireman's group of motorcycle riders and the Blue Knights, a law enforcement group of motorcycles would be present.

Gary contacted Sgt.Voorhees of the Hamilton Township Police Department to discuss road closings, funeral escort, and the laws concerning the distance picketers can be from the funeral. The police were not aware of the new ruling in New Jersey moving the protesters from 125 feet to 500 feet away, the New Jersey State Funeral Directors Association provided us with this information. Since The Westboro Baptist Church had posted all the funeral information on their web site we anticipated problems from these protesters, the Hamilton Township Police marked off the boundaries of 500 feet where they legally could stand.

On the never ending list was to coordinate all the Military, Fire and Emergency personnel attending as well as the motorcycle protective guards. We made provisions for the bikes to meet at the White Horse Fire Co. and had refreshments available. Gary also provided a map of the St. Raphael's Church and the parking facilities and a map of the cemetery. A call was placed to Fire Police Captain Tim Osterpuk to assist with traffic control. He called the Mercer County and Burlington County Fire Police Associations who provided a great service for the viewing and funeral. Chief Richard Soltis and director Gary Szabo arranged for a Crisis Management Team to be at the fire house during the week of arrangements to assist the members and any one in the emergency services and the family if they felt they needed their services. This service was well received by family and friends. The honor guard was assembled and shown the correct way to stand guard. During the day our staff contacted the Pastor of St. Raphael's Church because of the funeral parking and the dismissal of the school children trying to exit. The Pastor canceled school for the funeral.

Now the cemetery, I called the office of the Brigadier General William C. Doyle Veterans Cemetery in Wrightstown, NJ to arrange the burial. Because of the size of the funeral they blocked out a two hour time space with no other funerals to be held. Next order the burial vault, a call was placed to Beth Cooper of the Cooper Wilbert Vault Co, in Barrington NJ. Beth and her father Paul upgraded the vault to a Wilbert Salute and also provided the Iraq Freedom print at no cost to the family. From the onset of this funeral Gary was the spokesperson for the funeral home and Chief Richard Soltis for the White Horse Fire Co, which took a huge burden away from me. Arrangements were made for the reception following the funeral at the Colonial Fire Co, due to the seating capacity. Eric's aunt Lorraine Pateo is also involved in emergency services in Somerville NJ and arranged for their Bag Pipe and Drum Corp. to participate in the funeral.

On January 4, 2007 the morning of the visitation MSG. Sudhoff arrived at the funeral home for his final inspection of Eric, to ensure that the patches and medals were in the correct location. At the completion we were told that every thing was correct and ready to proceed. Because of the size of the family I sent two limousines to the house to pick-up the family, this allowed for more parking at the funeral home. We set up the memory boards and memory table was in place along with all the floral arrangements, fire company flags and Eric's fire fighting gear was on display. I had also made provisions for an E.M.T. to be present during the visitation. The Patriot Guard Riders were present; they stood guard each of them holding the American Flag. The funeral home property was completely surrounded by them. The family arrived at 12:30 PM so they could have some private time before the viewing from 2 to 4 PM. Also present from the Army was Major General Izzo from the Aberdeen Proving Grounds. At 4 PM the New Jersey State Police arrived to sweep the building, checking entry and exit ways since the Governor of the State of New Jersey, Jon Corzine would be attending the evening viewing. The family returned at 5:30 PM for the second viewing from 6 to 9 PM during which time the White Horse Fire Co held services and Christian wake service's were also held.

Since Eric was active in a Hamilton High School West class of 400 students and the fire services, not to mention his mother being a nurse and his father being a prison guard and firefighter and other family members were involved in emergency services throughout the state. We knew that all of these groups from all over the state would want to attend and the crowd potential and emotional level would be high. The viewings were enormous

but orderly.

By Gary's keeping the press informed they were present but not invasive at any time. At the request of the family they wanted the funeral filmed, and once again Gary made the connection to have this request fulfilled and hired Dan Crowell and Michael Szabo. To identify those hired to film the funeral a special ID tag was made by Gary, this way the staff knew that they were allowed to be there. Driving the video crew was appointed to Kevin Dalton our third funeral director and a member of the fire company also assisted in getting the camera men where they needed to be.

January 5, 2007 was an early start to the day, having all staff arrive at 6:30 AM. We had arranged with Robert Knott of the Knott Funeral Home, located just one block away to use his parking lot for the staff member's cars to allow more space in the neighborhood. Pallbearers were selected, the members of the White Horse Fire Co served from the funeral home to the church. Eric's casket was placed on the fire departments 1953 Ward LaFrance pumper and driven to church. At the entrance to the church parking lot the members of the Somerset Bag Pipe and Drum Corp. lead the funeral onto church grounds and played until the casket was taken into church. Once the casket was taken off the fire truck the military pallbearers took the casket into the church narthex. And was escorted to and from the alter by directors Dalton and Szabo. The mass was celebrated by the Pastor Jeff Kegley of the St. Raphael's Church and co officiated by Bishop Smith of the Trenton Diocese. The mass was almost over when Cliff Delaney led the bag pipers into the church to escort the funeral out of church. While playing Amazing Grace to a full sanctuary, all were in tears. Upon exiting church the casket was then placed in our hearse to go to the cemetery.

The procession to the cemetery went very well taking the size into account. The lead car was followed by hundreds of motorcycles, then the fire trucks, the hearse and limos and all the cars of the mourners. We passed the White Horse Fire Co, and made our way to the cemetery. Our arrival was right on time, thanks to the Police escort. We proceeded to get all the attendees as close to the burial shelter as possible. Pastor Jeff Kegley held the committal prayers; the flag was folded, and presented to Eric's parents, by Major General Izzo, while the bugler played Taps followed by a full twenty-one gun salute in true military fashion. The funeral then returned in procession to the funeral reception at the Colonial Fire Co. in Hamilton. Before his leaving the cemetery, Major General Izzo and MSG Sudhoff

complemented us on the care to the family and attention to every detail, which made all of us feel good.

Even though the funeral is over our services did not end there. Gary Szabo and his sons Michael, who filmed the services and Joseph, who edited the final footage, spent many hours refining the DVD for the family. We have enclosed a copy. We provided grief counseling and a list of support groups. At the request of the family Thumbies were provided for family and close friends. We also assisted with a blood drive at the fire house in Eric's memory. Directors Kingston, Szabo and Dalton are all members of the White Horse Volunteer Fire Company so were wearing several hats during this time.

On a personal note, this was the first death of a service person in our community. We knew him from birth and watched him grow to be a man. For myself this service was even harder because my son Ryan who went to school and served in the fire service with Eric, was on standby to be deployed with the Delaware National Guard as a medic and my step-son A.J. who is serving in the Army has already been on the front line was also about to return to combat in Iraq. Although it was an honor and privilege to serve Eric's family, I can only hope that the services of the staff at Kingston & Kemp Funeral Home are not needed any time soon due to a war related death. I also need to stress the point that your staff is the most important resource that you have, if not for the countless hours Gary devoted to the handling of this service, I would have been lost. His attention to the Wilkus funeral allowed Director's Kevin Dalton and Kingston to focus on the needs of the other family's we were serving during this time.

On Tuesday March 13, 2007 at noon Thornton Funeral Home made a long trip to Hot Springs, Ar. with a Arkansas State Trooper in front behind him was one Patriot Rider in front of the hearse behind were the vehicles of the Mother and Father and Immediate family and then a Montgomery County Police Officer. I had been in contact with the Patriot Riders and State Police and the Montgomery County Sheriff's office from the time I had received the phone call concerning the death of the young man who died in Iraq.

We got to the airport in Hot Springs, Ar. and pulled into the air field where the jet touched down and the family waited the arrival of their son who gave his life to try to save the life of another soldier. After the Military put the soldier into the hearse we got in line and I had put 30 Patriot Riders and the State Trooper in front and then 30 Patriot Riders behind the hearse and the family and Montgomery County Officer in the back of the procession. 2 of the Patriot Riders stayed right beside me on the front of the hearse the long 40 miles to Thornton Funeral Home.

I got in contact with the School Superentent where the soldier had attended and made arrangements to have the service in the gymnasium.

On March 14, 2007 there had been threats of protesters would be at the funeral service, not about the war but about the soldiers. And would try to stop the hearse.

The day of the Funeral, everyone arrived at the Funeral Home 2 hours before time to leave.

The Arkansas State Police, Montgomery County Police Department and Patriot Riders, and the Family of the deceased Soldier and the Military.

They let school out and all the people lined the sides of the streets and highway the 15 miles the Oden Gymnasium in Oden, AR.

About a mile from the Oden we had to stop the procession the protesters we there trying to stop the service. Several of the Patriots Riders went ahead and got in front of the protesters so they could not do anything to the hearse and the State Police and County Police, and Police Departments from nearby Counties were there to offer there support and help if necessary.

When we left the Service the Patriot Riders were beside of the hearse on the 2 lane highway going to the Cemetery which was 15 miles from the Services itself. When we arrived they had the lane to the Cemetery and in the Cemetery leading to the grave at least 100 large American Flags. The Honor Guard was present and the Mother and Father are divorced and the Military gave each parent the same things in double.

I am so proud of our Country and the help Thornton Funeral Home received in Military Service that we did for Staff Sgt. Justin M. Estes who was killed while trying to save the life of another Soldier.