

VFW Cover Etiquette and Ritual Ambiguity

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Military Etiquette and Tradition

General Rule: Military in uniform and under arms are not to uncover.

General Rule during outside ceremony: Military men in uniform not under arms generally do not uncover, as the cover is considered part of the uniform.

General Rule during inside ceremony: When the ceremony is inside, and the person in charge of the ceremony (chaplain or commander) calls for covers to be removed, then covers should likely be removed.

Military in Civilian Attire: When in civilian attire - men remove their covers.

Military and VFW Tradition

As a general rule, uniformed military personnel followed the lead of the uniformed military chaplain, or presiding officer, during a time of prayer.

This same custom has been followed by the VFW (i.e., follow the lead of the chaplain or presiding officer).

That is why the VFW Ritual General Rule 13b on page 3 states, “*members will follow the action of the Chaplain or presiding officer relative to removal of caps during prayers;*”

VFW Tradition during Opening Post Ceremonies

During the opening of post ceremonies, the post chaplain offers an opening prayer (cf. Ritual page 15). There is no statement as to whether the chaplain and those present uncover or remain covered. Based on the preceding (Military and VFW Tradition), and the mores of American/Western culture, most chaplains call for those present to uncover. Following the prayer, those present recover (whether a command to recover is issued or not).

This same logic holds true for the opening prayers at a District meeting, Department meeting, Conference meeting, and COA meetings.

NOTE: The words, “Chaplain: Uncover” could be added on page 15 just prior to the PRAYER. If so, “Chaplain: Recover” should be added on page 16 following the prayer.

Advantages:

- Establish uniformity
- Follow traditional mores of American/Western Culture
- Remove ambiguity

VFW Tradition during Post Meetings

After the Commander declares the Post duly opened for the transaction of business, the Ritual on page 17 states, (*When then Commander gives the command of “Parade Rest,” a member in uniform or wearing VFW cap shall remain at parade rest; shall not remove their cap during prayer (optional), and shall remain at parade rest until another command is given.*)

NOTE: Since it is the chaplain or presiding officer who determines whether covers are removed, the punctuation mark and the words (*; shall not remove their cap during prayer (optional), and shall remain at parade rest.*) should be removed.

The statement on page 17 would then read: *(When then Commander gives the command of "Parade Rest," a member in uniform or wearing VFW cap shall remain at parade rest until another command is given.)*

American Custom and Tradition

It has been the custom in America for males to remove head covering when entering buildings, when prayers are offered, and during the playing of the National Anthem as a sign of respect. Not to remove a hat at these times would be considered rude and disrespectful behavior.

Jewish Culture and Tradition

Jewish law requires men to cover their heads as a sign of respect and reverence for G-d when praying, studying Torah, saying a blessing or entering a synagogue. This practice has its roots in biblical times, when the priests in the Temple were instructed to cover their heads. Traditionally, Jewish men and boys wear the kippah (or yarmulke) at all times, a symbol of their awareness of, and submission to, a "higher" entity.

Muslim and Sikh Culture and Tradition

Muslims, and Sikhs all remain covered when in a holy assembly. Both have distinctive head gear which is specific to their needs.

General VFW Protocol

Because of the traditional mores of American/Western culture, most VFW chaplains call for the audience to uncover during prayers. Those of the Jewish faith will remove their VFW cover, and keep the traditional Jewish yarmulke on, thus remaining true to their faith practice while following and honoring the traditions of the VFW and American/Western culture. In other words, "When in Rome do as the Romans do."

Outside Funerals and Cover Etiquette

When attending outdoor funerals or grave side services, those in military uniform, and VFW members, wear their covers at all times. Military personnel are not to take off a cover while at an outside funeral in uniform.

Understanding this, some VFW Chaplains call for VFW members to remain covered during prayers at an outside funeral service.

Because civilians will most likely uncover (and expect those participating to do the same) since it is considered a sign of respect to do so, there are VFW Chaplains who will call for the funeral detail and those present to uncover.

Funerals Indoors and Cover Etiquette

The Ritual states on page 91: *All military or VFW details shall, in church, have heads bared except while actually functioning. Members of color detail and firing squad, functioning, do not remove caps. Uniformed pallbearers remain covered while carrying casket. Uniformed members not in formation, but attending services as individuals, stand at attention with cap held to left breast whenever casket is moved by pallbearers and during salutes and Taps.*

Therefore, caps are only worn when actually functioning. In that case, those functioning at the funeral would: *"follow the action of the Chaplain or presiding officer relative to removal of caps during prayers."*

Civilians attending a funeral in civilian attire, should not wear a cover. If wearing a civilian hat or headdress while attending a funeral, it is appropriate (and a visible sign of respect) to remove the hat or headdress and place it over your heart. Understanding this to be so, most chaplains will call for the VFW funeral detail to uncover during the prayers. Following the prayers, they recover.