

It is a common tradition at military funerals for three spent shell casings from the ceremonial rifle volleys to be placed inside the folded burial flag before it is presented to the next of kin. However, this practice is symbolic rather than strictly required by military protocol, and some honor guards present the casings separately instead of inside the flag.

Background on the Tradition

- **Three Rifle Volleys:** At a military funeral, the honor guard fires three volleys of blank cartridges. This dates back to European battlefield customs where volleys signaled a pause to collect the fallen.
- **Symbolism of the Casings:** The three shell casings represent **Duty, Honor, and Country** — values central to military service.
- **Placement in the Flag:**
 - Often, the honor guard discreetly slips the three casings into the folded flag before presenting it.
 - Some traditionalists argue the casings should be handed separately, since reopening the flag after folding is discouraged.
- **Presentation:** The folded flag (sometimes containing the casings) is given to the next of kin “on behalf of the President and a grateful nation” as a tribute to the deceased’s service.

Protocol vs. Tradition

Aspect	Official Protocol	Common Practice
Rifle volleys	Required if honor guard available	Always three volleys
Shell casings	Collected after volleys	Symbolically Represent Duty, Honor, Country
Placement	Not mandated	Often slipped into folded flag
Alternatives	Casings presented separately	Depends on honor guard team

Key Takeaway

The inclusion of **three spent cartridges in the folded flag is a respected tradition, not a strict regulation**. Families may receive them inside the flag or separately, depending on the honor guard detail. Either way, the gesture honors the veteran’s service and sacrifice.