

‘A Critical Service to Families’

For decades, the Army’s Joint Munitions Command has provided VFW Posts and many other organizations with free blank ammunition, giving VFW Posts the ability to properly honor deceased veterans for their military service

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VFW Post honor guards conducting three-volley salutes at funerals for veterans and service members has been a time-honored tradition practiced since the organization’s founding in 1899. While many know that VFW Post honor guards use firearms to salute their dearly departed fellow veterans, most may not know where those firearms and ammunition blanks come from.

The Army-Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command, which is in Warren, Michigan, issues ammunition blanks it receives from the Joint Munitions Command, located in Rock Island, Illinois. The command then sends the ammunition free of charge to VFW Posts across the country. Without those donations, many veterans would not receive military honors after their passing.

Former VFW Administrative Operations Director Johnathan Duncan said that the relationship VFW has with the Army’s Joint Munitions Command and the Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command is one VFW cherishes.

“It is a valuable one to not only the VFW but to those families who are able to have VFW honor guards at the funerals of those who gave so much to this country,” Duncan said.

Matthew Wheaton, a spokesman for the Joint Munitions Command, said that in 2022 the command supplied 3 million rounds of ceremonial ammunition across the United States to several veterans organizations, including VFW.

According to VFW’s Congressional Charter, the organization has a duty to “perpetuate the memory and history of our dead.” Duncan said that the main way VFW has done that is by

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conducting
ceremonial honors at veterans' funerals.

“I think it is a critical service to the families whether they are members of the organization or not,” Duncan said. “We are able to provide these honors because of the ceremonial ammo and rifles that are provided to us. Three-volley salutes are used to perpetuate the memory and history of our dead, and to recognize the fallen comrades who gave all.” (See sidebar on p. 37.)

Providing ammunition for ceremonies is a traditional mission for Joint Munitions Command. Since the end of World War II, the Army has supplied ceremonial ammunition to veterans' organizations for the purpose of military honors, according to a press release.

Telacy Biles, a logistics management specialist for the Joint Munitions Command, said that in recent years, requests for blank ammunition have increased.

“It has gone up because you have a lot of people who have gotten older, so the veterans' organizations see an increase in funerals,” Biles said.

Only authorized organizations that have been issued weapons through the Army-Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command are eligible to order, receive and be issued blank ammunition. Those with privately owned rifles or rifles borrowed from another organization are not eligible to receive blanks.

For more information about the ceremonial rifle program, visit <https://www.tacom.army.mil/ilsc/donations/rifles> or call 586.282.9861.

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