

HONORS: Military honor guard presents farewell to deceased veterans

(Continued from Page 3)

Dengel said if the family wishes to use a funeral honors detail from the branch of service the deceased was affiliated with instead of the local VFW, he makes the call and the arrangements.

"If it's the Army, we call Fort Riley. For the Air Force, we call Whitman," he said. "They'll do the flag folding ceremony and play 'Taps,' but they always bring a recorded version. There just aren't that many musicians in the military anymore."

Military honors for veterans arranged by Dengel, to be provided by VFW Post 5901, more than likely will have a live bugler.

"Whenever possible we arrange for Ron Matthews to play," Dengel said.

Matthews, a local musician, has played "Taps" at military funerals since he was in high school.

"I used to think it was a really cool way to get out of school early," Matthews remembered.

"When I play, I consider it an honor to be asked and to provide that service to the family."

Matthews uses a trumpet to sound out the 24 notes.

"It's not a difficult thing to memorize, but I have to be careful not to get too emotional because I wouldn't be



Photo by Elliot J. Sutherland/The Ottawa Herald

Ron Matthews demonstrates how he emulates a bugle with his trumpet. Bugles are used to perform "Taps," a military honor presented at the funerals of veterans.

able to play it," he said.

Matthews' father, Loren Matthews, was the band director at Ottawa High School from 1959 to 1974 and had his son playing the trumpet from the age of 5.

"I'll continue to play as long as they continue to ask me," Ron Matthews

said. "It really is an honor."

Families also may try to get a live bugler from Bugles Across America, a nationwide nonprofit organization with more than 5,000 bugler volunteers in all 50 states.

Founded in 2000 by Tom Day, a 50-year Drum and Bugle Corps member from Illinois, the group feels that every veteran deserves a rendition of "Taps" played by a live bugler.

Requests may be made by e-mail at buglesacrossamerican.org

After the request is made, a message will go out to all volunteers within 100 miles of the funeral location to find a bugler to play their comrade home.

One last 'thank you'

Part of the full military honors at funerals is the draping of the casket with an American flag and its presentation to the next of kin following the service.

The U.S. government provides a 5-foot-by-9 1/2-foot flag at no charge.

A military honor guard respectfully stands at attention during the funeral service.

At the close of the service, after

"Taps" has been played, the flag is removed by the honor guard, folded and presented to the next of kin with thanks, "on behalf of a grateful nation."

"The flag is folded 13 times," Ross said. "Every one of those 13 folds has a meaning. Once we get it folded, we kneel down on one knee in front of the next of kin. After we've presented the flag, we stand up and do a slow, respectful salute and return to attention."

The Army adopted the tradition in 1918 as a sign of the nation's gratitude. The custom, however, dates back nearly two centuries when flags covered the dead as they were removed from the battlefield.

The triangular fold is symbolic of the tri-cornered hat worn by the soldiers in the Revolutionary War.


The flag is folded with precision and care is taken to avoid wrinkles. The flag is cradled to the honor guard's chest to smooth out any wrinkles before it's presented to the next of kin.

"To pay respect to the veteran and the family one last time is a huge honor," Ross said. "It's one last time to say 'Thank you.'"




File photo/The Ottawa Herald

Ron Kimes, Kansas Army National Guard, salutes members of the Vietnam Veterans Association Honor Guard of Chapter 912 last year during the playing of "Taps" at the Ottawa War Memorial Wall.



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