

## CHAPTER 20

# VIGILS, CATAFALQUE PARTIES AND MEMORIAL DEDICATION SERVICES

### Introduction

**20.1** This chapter deals with the mounting of catafalque parties (guards mounted over catafalques) for occasions other than Anzac Day or Remembrance Day (see [chapter 21—‘Anzac and Remembrance Day ceremonies’](#)), and with the suggested format for Memorial Dedication Services.

**20.2** A catafalque is normally mounted for one of the following occasions:

- a. during a period of lying-in-state,
- b. during a military funeral service in a church, and
- c. during a memorial service in a church for a recently deceased distinguished personage.

### History

**20.3** A catafalque is a raised structure supporting a stand, upon which a coffin is placed for display before burial; people may then file past and pay their last respects to the deceased person. In times gone by a watch, or vigil, was mounted around the coffin to ensure that the body was not interfered with whilst it lay in State. Today vigils, or catafalque parties, are mounted as a sign of respect around personages as they lie in State, and around memorials on occasions of remembrance such as Anzac Day (it could be said that a memorial is a ‘symbolic coffin’ for those who have fallen).

**20.4** The origin of the tradition of resting on reversed arms is lost in time, however, it was used by a Commonwealth soldier at the execution of Charles I in 1649 (the soldier was, however, duly punished for his symbolic gesture towards the King's death and it is recorded that at the funeral for Marlborough, in 1722, the troops carried out a formal reverse arms drill, which was especially invented for the service, as a unique sign of respect to the great soldier).

**20.5** The ‘modern trend’ of sticking rifles upside down into the ground as a temporary memorial to a fallen soldier (with a helmet or a hat over the butt) originated with the introduction of tanks. When a soldier fell during an advance his mate would pick up the rifle and stick it into the ground, by the bayonet, as a marker to indicate to the tanks that a wounded or dead soldier lay there; this way the armoured vehicle would not accidentally run over the body.

### Composition of catafalque parties

**20.6** If a catafalque party is required to be mounted for an extended period of time (eg for a period of several days during a lying-in-state) the party is to be divided into ‘watches’; each watch being six hours in duration. A watch is made up of four vigils, with each vigil mounting for a period of half an hour (followed by a break of one and one half hours). However, vigils are NOT to be changed during a Service.

**20.7** The composition of a watch is as follows:

- a. watch commander (normally a major but, not to be below the rank of warrant officer class one); and
- b. four vigils.

**20.8** The composition of a vigil (catafalque party) is as follows:

- a. a commander;
- b. four sentries; and
- c. a waiting member.

**20.9** Where a watch is mounted for a period of lying-in-state, each vigil is to be made-up of personnel of the same rank, with the senior person as the vigil commander. The vigils are normally composed as follows:

- a. first vigil: 4 x majors;
- b. second vigil: 4 x captains;
- c. third vigil: 4 x lieutenants; and
- d. fourth vigil: 4 x warrant officers class 1.

**20.10** Should it be decided to use private soldiers as the sentries, the vigil commander is to be either a sergeant or a corporal.

**20.11** A catafalque party is not to be senior in rank to the deceased for whom it is mounted, however, where it is thought to be desirable a party of senior officers may form the first vigil for 15 minutes of the watch during a period of lying-in-state.

### **Composition of other catafalque parties**

**20.12** The following is a guide for the composition of other catafalque parties:

- a. for funerals of Vice-Regal personages and general officers commanding—officers;
- b. for funerals of other general officers and personages accorded a State Funeral—warrant officers or senior noncommissioned officers; and
- c. on other occasions—junior noncommissioned officers or private soldiers.

### **Provision of catafalque parties**

**20.13** The local area commander may authorise the provision of a catafalque party on the appropriate occasions and determines the following:

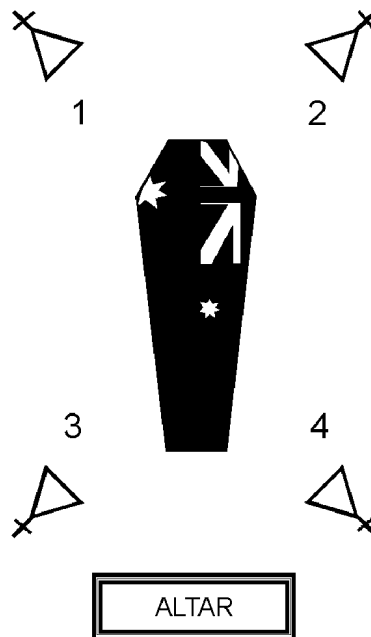
- a. the rank structure of the catafalque party;
- b. the duration of the party's attendance, which may be as follows:
  - (1) from the time the coffin is placed in a church until the public lying-in-state finishes;
  - (2) from the time the coffin is placed in a church until the funeral service commences;
  - (3) from the time the coffin is placed in a church until the funeral service concludes;
  - (4) from the time the public lying-in-state commences until the public lying-in-state finishes;
  - (5) from the time the public lying-in-state commences until the funeral service commences;
  - (6) from the time the public lying-in-state commences until the funeral service concludes; or
  - (7) for a specified time during a period of lying-in-state.

### **Positions and duties for the party at a lying-in-state or at a funeral**

**20.14** The positions of the members of a catafalque party around a catafalque, assuming the foot of the coffin is nearest the altar, are as follows ([figure 20-1](#)):

- a. the senior officer on the right of the coffin at the head end;
- b. the second senior officer on the left of the coffin at the head end;
- c. the next senior officer on the right of the coffin at the foot end;

- d. the most junior officer on the left of the coffin at the foot end; and
- e. the vigil commander and the waiting member in an inconspicuous position where they may observe all four members on duty (and where the waiting member may easily take over from any member who may become ill).



**Figure 20-1: Positioning of sentries around a coffin**

**20.15** The vigil commander is to post the vigil.

**20.16** Should a sentry feel unfit to carry on the vigil, the sentry is to lift the head and, on this signal the vigil commander is to immediately call forward the waiting member to take the sentry's place. The ill sentry is to remain with his head raised until relieved.

**20.17** Should a member of the deceased's family address a sentry of a vigil the sentry is to raise the head to the attention position. At the end of the conversation the sentry is to lower the head, resuming the rest on arms position.

#### **Positions at a memorial or cenotaph**

**20.18** When a catafalque party is positioned around a memorial, or a cenotaph, the order of seniority for the positioning of the sentries is as follows (figure 20-2):

- a. the senior officer at the left front of the memorial (as seen from the front);
- b. the second senior officer at the right front of the memorial (as seen from the front);
- c. the next senior officer at the left rear of the memorial (as seen from the front);
- d. the most junior officer at the right rear of the memorial (as seen from the front); and
- e. the vigil commander and the waiting member in an inconspicuous position where they may observe all four members on duty (and where the waiting member may easily takeover from any member who may become ill).

#### **Note**

The 'front' of a memorial is described as that side of the memorial that bears an inscription or that is approached by a path and/or steps. If doubt exists, advice should be sought from local authorities.

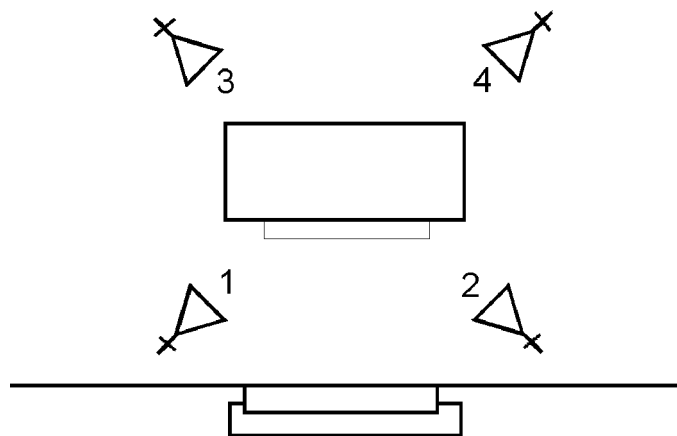


Figure 20-2: Positioning of sentries around a memorial

### Mounting of vigils

20.19 The procedure for the mounting of vigils is laid down in [annexes A and B](#).

### Memorial dedication services

20.20 A suggested format for a Memorial Dedication Service is laid down in [annex C](#).

### Annexes:

- A. [Procedure for the mounting of vigils \(officers with swords\)](#)
- B. [Procedure for the mounting of vigils \(troops with rifles\)](#)
- C. [Suggested format for a Memorial Dedication Service](#)