

# Burial at Sea

“Our **MAIN GOAL** is to make sure the loved ones **KNOW** that we **TREATED** their service member with **RESPECT** and **DIGNITY**.”

-RP2 (SW) Brooks Kuhn,  
assistant to the Burial at Sea

*Story and Photo Illustration by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Megan Anuci*

On a breezy, bright morning, the mighty warship floated quietly through the calm sea. It seemed like a normal, Monday morning, except this was a very special morning. The crisp air wafted over Sailors and Marines poised like statues for a ceremony. These hard-working service members had practiced vigilantly the days prior, to honor twelve brave men and women. This was the beginning of a burial at sea.

USS Iwo Jima deployed on Dec. 11, 2014 and carried with it twelve very important passengers, kept in the sacristy, or place where holy items are protected, until the moment when they were released to the Red Sea. Each urn was delicately placed on a white cloth and checked on regularly by the Religious Program Specialists (RPs.)

The three hardworking RPs worked for weeks behind the scenes to prepare for the burial at sea. This involved carefully moving the remains from an urn to biodegradable bags and boxes; so there could be no impact on the environment. Then, holes were carefully drilled into the boxes to allow water to fill the box and slowly pull it beneath the surface of the sea.

“Our main goal is to make sure the loved ones know that we treated their service member with respect and dignity,” said Religious Program Specialist 2nd Class (SW) Brooks Kuhn. “We want them to know that we are honored to do this, as opposed to tasked with it. We also want them to know that we appreciate their sacrifice.”

“It’s not something that we want to just walk through

the motions,” said Religious Program Specialist 2nd Class (FMF) Benjamin Sheets. “We want to perfect it because we take pride in it. These were service members and dependents of service members and we want to show them that proper respect.”

All the participants, from the rifle detail, to the urn bearer, were professional in their movements. The burial officer, Lt. j.g. Wai Gei Yau, carefully placed each box on the elevator chute and let it gracefully slide off the side of the ship. The ceremony concluded with the ceremonial ensign given to Capt. Dana Gordon, commanding officer.

“We made sure everyone knew exactly what they were doing,” said Kuhn. “They were dedicated to the ceremony and showing the proper respect.”

After the ceremony, the position of the ship and where the boxes were released are charted and maps are sent home to the families left behind by their beloved’s passing. The families also receive a copy of the deck log, a letter from the commanding officer and shell casings from the rifle detail.

“This is a very important part of our job,” said Sheets. “We may do all the behind-the-scenes work, but knowing that the ceremony was successful is the biggest accomplishment.”

The twelve service members and dependents have now reached their final resting place in the sea.

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