

Caisson and Riderless Horse

Six horses are used to pull the caisson, although all six are saddled, the three on the left side have riders, while the three on the right do not. This custom evolved from the days when horse-drawn caissons were the primary means of moving artillery ammunition and cannon, and the riderless horses carried provisions.

The single riderless horse that followed the caisson with boots reversed in the stirrups is called the "Caparisoned Horse" in reference to its ornamental coverings, which have a detailed protocol all to themselves. By tradition in military funeral honors, a Caparisoned Horse follows the casket of an Army or Marine Corps officer who was a colonel or above, or the casket of a president, by virtue of having been the nation's military Commander in Chief.

The custom is believed to date back to the time of Genghis Khan, when a horse was sacrificed to serve the fallen warrior in the next world. The Caparisoned Horse later came to symbolize a warrior who would ride no more. Abraham Lincoln, who was killed in 1865, was the first U.S. president to be honored with a Caparisoned Horse at his funeral.