

Eligibility and Burial Benefits

Veterans

- *All veterans* are entitled to **burial in a national cemetery**, a granite or marble **headstone** (regardless of the cemetery), and a **flag**. Spouses and dependent children are also entitled to a lot and marker but only in a national cemetery. There will be no charges for opening or closing the grave, a vault or liner, or setting the marker in a national cemetery. Usually, a family is responsible for all other expenses including transportation to the cemetery.

- *Death during active duty.* All funeral expenses will be paid by the military—body preparation, casket, transportation to the place of disposition, interment (if in a national cemetery), and marker. In addition, as of July, 2005, next-of-kin are entitled to a “death gratuity” of \$100,000, retroactive to October 7, 2001.

- *Death due to a service-related injury.* There is a \$2,000 burial allowance for these veterans which may be used to cover some of the funeral director's expenses, the casket, and transportation to the cemetery. **If** death occurred in a VA facility, transport of the body to the cemetery will be paid, provided it is no farther than the last place of residence.

If burial is not in a national cemetery, there is a \$300 interment allowance, but it is unlikely that will cover opening and closing or vault charges, let alone the cost of the lot. Although a marker is available at no charge, the private cemetery will probably have a setting fee.

- *Non service-related death in a VA facility OR while collecting a VA pension, disability compensation or Aid and Attendance benefits.* There is a \$300 burial allowance which may be used to defray some of the usual funeral expenses. Although burial in a national cemetery is free to these veterans and spouses, all other mortuary expenses are the responsibility of the

family. Transportation to a national cemetery (not farther than the residence of the deceased) will be provided only if the death occurs in a VA facility. The \$300 interment allowance applies when burial is in other than a national cemetery.

- *Death of a veteran outside a VA facility*, not receiving military pension or disability/A&A compensation. The \$2,000 and \$300 benefits do not apply, nor is there reimbursement for transportation to the cemetery. The lot in a national cemetery, any required vault, interment, a granite or marble marker, and flag are the only burial benefits. If interment is in other than a national cemetery, the family is responsible for the cost of the lot, opening and closing charges, the vault, and any fee charged for setting the government marker if that is selected. The family must also bear all other funeral costs.

- *State and County.* Ask your local veterans' office if there are any state and county death benefits for veterans.

Spouse and Dependents

- A spouse and dependents of an eligible veteran are entitled to burial in a national cemetery even if the veteran is not buried there.

A spouse who remarries a non-veteran may claim burial rights from the prior marriage. Spouses receiving military pay and who die in a military medical facility are eligible for military transport to the nearest national cemetery or no farther than the last permanent residence. Adult children of veterans are entitled to burial benefits only if disabled and dependent.

Others Who May be Eligible

- There are a number of others eligible for veterans' burial benefits if the person has provided military-related service. The list is quite long and includes civilians who were involved with military efforts during war-time. Members of the National Guard and Reserves with 20 years of service are eligible. Some Public Health

Service personnel are also eligible. You should inquire if you believe you might be entitled to such benefits.

Documentation needed to claim benefits:

Discharge papers (DD214 or equivalent). For spouse: that and marriage license.

Persons Not Eligible

- Divorced spouses
- Adult children
- Parents, siblings and others—even if they are dependents
- Those with a dishonorable discharge
- Those convicted of subversive activities or capital crimes.

Markers

- *Memorials are available to all veterans, spouses, and dependent children buried in a national cemetery and will be set without charge.* For veterans who died before Sept. 11, 2001, markers are available to them – not to spouses or dependents – for use in other cemeteries unless the grave already has a private memorial. For veterans who died on or after Sept. 11, 2001, the government will provide a marker for use in an outside cemetery even if the grave already has a stone. The installation cost must be borne by the family when in a non-government cemetery. Several styles of markers are available and must be consistent with existing monuments. Niche markers for cremains are also available. It takes about 90 days to get a VA marker.

Inscription must include name, branch of service, year of birth, year of death—in this order—and may include emblem of belief, rank, and decorations earned. At private expense, additional items—such as nick-names and terms of endearment—may be added but must be approved by the VA.

Miscellaneous Benefits & Other Information

- You may not reserve space in a national cemetery ahead of time; arrangements are made only at the time of death.
- Burials in a national cemetery are not usually conducted on weekends.
- National cemeteries provide space for both body burial and cremated remains.
- Check with the cemetery regarding gravesite adornments other than natural cut flowers.
- Military honors or a funeral honor guard may be available from nearby military installations or veterans groups. Fly-overs are reserved for those on active duty at the time of death.
- A flag is provided on request for the burial of any veteran. Apply through the VA and pick up at a U.S. Post Office. Family members may wish to purchase a flag case for later display, available through private sources.
- Next-of-kin, other relatives or friends may request a "Presidential Memorial Certificate." More than one may be requested.
- A family may apply directly to the VA for all benefits. Although it may be convenient to let the undertaker do so, you may wish to ask if the mortician charges for submitting claims.
- When the body of a veteran without next-of-kin is unclaimed from a VA facility and the estate is without sufficient assets, the VA will assume responsibility for burial.
- Other than for sea burial, there are NO casket requirements for routine body burial. An undertaker handling the unclaimed body of a vet must supply something more durable than cardboard, unless the body is to be cremated.
- "No-fee" passports are available for family visiting overseas grave-sites or memorials.
- The National Cemetery System may be asked to do a search to locate anyone interred in a national cemetery. In addition to general vital statistics, you will need to know the state from which the veteran entered military service.
- State-run veterans cemeteries offer similar benefits, with some restrictions. www.cem.va.gov/

Caution!

The VA has gotten complaints from vets who were approached by commercial funeral outfits offering "free" cemetery lots or other so-called "veterans' benefits." They DO NOT represent the U.S. government! Be sure to ask:

- Must you also purchase another lot?
- Where is it located? How much will it cost?
- Is "perpetual care" additional?
- What are the costs for opening and closing each grave?
- Must certain memorials be purchased through the cemetery?
- What are the costs for setting memorials?
- Is a vault required? Even for cremated remains? May it be purchased elsewhere?
- Are there marker or planting restrictions?
- What are the "administrative" charges?
- Who owns the cemetery? Are there nearby municipal or religious cemeteries which charge less for the same services?

Burial At Sea

Burial (or the scattering of cremains) at sea is available to all veterans and dependents, and is provided by the Navy or US Coast Guard. A flag is required, and—if supplied by the family— can be returned. If supplied by the Navy, it will not be.

Because sea burials are done at the convenience of the military, the family may not witness sea burial. Bodies waiting for sea burial must be embalmed to a state of preservation that will last for at least 60 days. (This is accomplished with undiluted embalming fluid; "stiff.") A non-sealing metal casket must be used, bound with six bands of nylon. The casket must carry 150 lbs. of extra weight. Two-inch holes (20 total) must be drilled in the top, bottom, and at each end.

**To reach the regional Veterans office
in your area call 800-827-1000, or
visit www.cem.va.gov**

Veterans' Funeral and Burial Benefits

*Including Spouses and Dependent
Children*

What You Get and What You Don't



Funeral Consumers Alliance
33 Patchen Road
South Burlington, VT 05403
802-865-8300
800-765-0107

www.funerals.org