

Veterans

Most veterans are entitled to a free burial in any national VA cemetery with available space. There is no charge for the gravesite, opening and closing the grave, a vault or liner, perpetual care of the gravesite, a headstone or marker, and a burial flag. For burial in a private cemetery anywhere in the world, most veterans are eligible for a free government-issued headstone or marker and a burial flag.

- **Burial allowance.** Survivors of certain eligible veterans can receive a predetermined burial allowance to reimburse them for some burial, funeral and transportation costs not covered by other organizations. These benefits apply to all legal arrangements, including cremation, burial at sea, and donating the remains to a medical school. An itemized receipt must be submitted for transportation reimbursement.
  - **Service-related death.** Veterans who died as a result of a service-connected disability or injury, or while getting VA care, or while receiving a VA pension or compensation, would be eligible for a maximum burial allowance of $2,000 plus some or all of the cost of transporting the remains to a national, state, or tribal VA cemetery.
  - **Non-service-related death.** For a non-service-connected death, the maximum benefit is about $1,000 for burial and $1,000 for a plot, and in some cases a portion of the cost of transporting the remains. Claims must be filed within two years.
- **Special cases.** If a veteran dies while admitted to a VA facility and the remains are unclaimed, the facility director will ensure proper burial for the veteran. For an indigent veteran with no next of kin, the VA will furnish either a casket or cremation urn for interment in either a national, state, or tribal veterans cemetery.
- **State and county.** Ask your local veterans' office if there are any state and county death benefits for veterans.

Spouse and dependents

The spouse and minor dependent children of any eligible veteran are entitled to burial in a national VA cemetery, even if they predecease the veteran. Adult children of veterans can receive burial benefits only if unmarried and dependent. The VA provides one gravesite and a single headstone for all eligible family members; two side-by-side graves and headstones can be requested for two married veterans. A surviving spouse who remarries a non-veteran may claim burial rights from the prior marriage. There are no benefits for divorced spouses who are not veterans, or for spouses or dependents buried at a private cemetery.

Others who may be eligible

A number of others are eligible for veterans' burial benefits if the person has provided military-related service. The list is long and includes civilians who were involved with military efforts during wartime. Some members of the National Guard and Reserves and some Public Health Service officers are also eligible. You should inquire if you believe you might be entitled to such benefits.

Documentation needed to claim benefits:

Veteran: Discharge papers (DD214 or equivalent) and death certificate.

Spouse: Veteran's discharge papers (DD214) and marriage license.

Persons not eligible

- Veterans with a dishonorable discharge
- Divorced spouses who are not also veterans
- Most adult children
- Parents, siblings and other relatives, even if they are dependents
- Anyone convicted of subversive activities or capital crimes

Markers

Free memorials are available to any eligible veteran, and there is no charge for setting the marker in a national VA cemetery. Some state-run VA cemeteries may change a small fee. When burial is in a private cemetery, the family must pay for the installation. Several styles of headstones and markers are available and must be consistent with existing monuments. Niche markers for cremated remains are also available. There is a maximum allowance of about $440 for families wishing to purchase a non-government-issued headstone or marker.

For those veterans whose grave is in a private cemetery and already marked with a purchased headstone, a medallion signifying the deceased's status as a veteran or as a Medal of Honor recipient can be requested from the VA and easily affixed.

Burial at sea

Burial at sea or the scattering of cremated remains at sea is available to all veterans honorably discharged and their eligible dependents, and is provided by the US Navy. Next of kin must submit a Burial at Sea Request Form to the Navy. There is no charge for the committal to the sea but the body must be prepared by a funeral director and/or crematory and transported to the port of embarkation. The application process, ship assignment and deployment can take a year or more. Because sea burials are performed while the ship is deployed, the family cannot be present, but they may receive pictures or a video later. Call 833-330-6622 for more information, or to receive the Burial at Sea packet.



Other information

- You cannot reserve space in a national VA cemetery; arrangements are made only at the time of death. However, you can check your eligibility and space availability ahead of time through the VA's website, www.va.gov.
- National VA cemeteries can accommodate regular and green burials as well as cremated remains.
- Eligible survivors are now paid any burial allowance automatically when the VA receives notification of the veteran's death. A family may apply directly to the VA for additional benefits. Although it may be convenient to let the funeral home do so, you may wish to ask if they charge for submitting claims.
- Burials in a national VA cemetery are not usually conducted on weekends or holidays.
- Check with the cemetery regarding gravesite adornments other than fresh cut flowers.
- A burial flag is provided at no charge for any veteran not dishonorably discharged; the flag can be draped on a casket or coffin or placed with an urn. You can apply through the VA. A flag case for later display can be purchased from a commercial company.
- Veterans are entitled to military funeral honors, and families can request this through the funeral home. The ceremony is conducted by two or more uniformed members of the military and includes the playing of Taps and folding and presenting a flag to the next of kin.
- The family of a veteran can receive a free Presidential Memorial Certificate, a gold-embossed paper certificate honoring the veteran and signed by the President. Other relatives or friends may also request copies.
- You can use the National Cemetery Administration's "Nationwide Gravesite Locator" to locate the grave of a veteran or family member at a national or state-run veterans cemetery. You should provide the full name and dates of birth and death.
- State, territory and tribal veterans cemeteries may offer similar benefits, with some restrictions.

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 US government! Be sure to ask:

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

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For more information, call the VA office at 800-698-2411, or visit www.va.gov.

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Veterans' Funeral and Burial Benefits

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