



Veterans

■ All veterans are entitled to burial in one of the 136 national veterans cemeteries, a headstone or marker, and a burial flag. There will be no charge for the gravesite, opening and closing the grave, a vault or liner, and setting the marker. For burial in a private cemetery, veterans will only receive a free government-issued headstone or marker and a flag. Usually a family is responsible for all other expenses, such as body preparation, casket or urn, and transportation.

■ **Death during active duty.** All funeral expenses for these veterans will be paid by the military service—body preparation, casket or urn, transportation to the place of disposition, a gravesite in a national cemetery, interment, headstone or marker, and flag. In addition, immediate family members receive free transportation to the burial site. Next of kin are entitled to a “death gratuity” of \$100,000 as well.

■ **Death due to a service-related injury.** The veteran is entitled to burial in a national cemetery, a headstone or marker, and a burial flag. These veterans also receive a burial allowance of up to \$2,000 to cover some of the funeral director’s expenses, the casket, and transportation. If the veteran is buried in a national cemetery, some or all of the costs to transport the body may be reimbursed.

■ **Non service-related deaths.** In most cases, the veteran is entitled to burial in a national cemetery, a headstone or marker, and a burial flag, but no burial allowance. If buried in a private cemetery, the veteran would receive only a free headstone or marker and a flag. All other mortuary expenses are the responsibility of the family.

However, burial allowances are given to veterans who meet specific criteria. For example, for a death *within* a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care facility, up to \$780 is given toward funeral and burial expenses. If death occurs *outside* a VA health care facility, *but* the

veteran is collecting a VA pension or disability compensation, the veteran can receive \$300 toward funeral and burial expenses. In both these cases, for burials not in a national cemetery, the VA will pay an additional \$780 for the plot or interment. *Note: The burial and plot allowances increase annually based on the Consumer Price Index for the preceding year.*

■ **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 dependents of any eligible veteran are entitled to burial and a marker in a national cemetery, even if they predecease the veteran or the veteran is buried elsewhere. Adult children of veterans are entitled to burial benefits only if unmarried, disabled and dependent. A spouse who remarries a non-veteran may claim burial rights from the prior marriage. There are no benefits 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 personnel 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: Discharge papers (DD214) and marriage license.

Persons not eligible

- Veterans with a dishonorable discharge
- Divorced spouses
- Most adult children

- Parents, siblings and other relatives, even if they are dependents
- Anyone convicted of subversive activities or capital crimes.

Markers

Memorials are available without charge to any eligible veteran buried anywhere in the world, and there is no charge for setting the marker in a national VA cemetery or military post cemetery. When burial is in a private cemetery, the family must pay for the installation of the marker. Spouses and dependent children may receive a government-furnished marker if buried in a national or state VA cemetery or military post cemetery. Several styles of markers are available and must be consistent with existing monuments. Niche markers for cremated remains are also available. It takes about 90 days to get a VA marker.

The veteran’s inscription must include full legal name, branch of service, and years of birth and death, and may include an emblem of belief, the rank, and decorations earned. At private expense, additional items such as nicknames and military or civilian accomplishments may be added but must be approved by the VA.

Burial at sea

Burial at sea or the scattering of cremains at sea is available to all veterans honorably discharged and their dependents, and is provided by the US 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 point of embarkation. A flag is required for the veteran’s committal and, if supplied by the family, can be returned. Because sea burials are done while the ship is deployed, the family cannot be present. However, they will be notified of the date, time, longitude and latitude after the committal service has been completed.



Other information

- You cannot reserve space in a national cemetery ahead of time; arrangements are made only at the time of death.
- National cemeteries provide space for both body burial and 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 cemetery are not usually conducted on weekends.
- Check with the cemetery regarding gravesite adornments other than natural cut flowers.
- A burial flag is provided at no charge for the burial of any veteran not dishonorably discharged. You can apply through the VA and pick up the flag at a US Post Office. Family members may wish to purchase a flag case for later display, available through private sources.
- Veterans are entitled to military funeral honors, and families can request the ceremony through the funeral home. The ceremony is conducted by two or more uniformed military persons and includes folding and presenting a flag and the playing of Taps.
- Next of kin, other relatives or friends may request a Presidential Memorial Certificate, an engraved paper certificate honoring the veteran and signed by the President. More than one may be requested.
- 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.
- 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 will need to provide the full name and dates of birth and death.

- State-run veterans cemeteries offer similar benefits, with some restrictions. See 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 US 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 that charge less for the same services?



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

Veterans’ Funeral and Burial Benefits

Funeral Consumers Alliance™

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