



Veterans

■ All veterans are entitled to burial in a national cemetery, a granite or marble headstone (regardless of the cemetery), and a flag. 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, next-of-kin are entitled to a “death gratuity” of \$100,000.

■ **Death due to a service-related injury.** There is a \$2,000 burial allowance for these veterans that may be used to cover some of the funeral director’s expenses, the casket, and transportation to the cemetery. If the veteran is buried in a VA cemetery, some or all of the costs to transport the body may be paid. This is decided on a case-by-case basis.

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 health care facility.** The VA will pay \$722 toward funeral or burial expenses. If burial occurs outside a VA cemetery the VA will pay an additional \$722 for the plot or interment costs.

■ **Non service-related death that occurs outside a VA health care facility, and when the veteran is collecting a VA pension or disability compensation.** The VA will pay \$300 toward funeral or burial expenses. Although burial in a national cemetery is free to these veterans and spouses, all other mortuary expenses are the responsibility of the family. 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 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 and a marker 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 wartime. 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 spouses, the DD214 plus 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. When burial is in a non-VA cemetery, the family must pay for the setting or installation of the marker. 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 nicknames and terms of endearment— may be added but must be approved by the VA.

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. A special non-sealing metal casket, with nylon bands and drilled holes, must be used.

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 US 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 funeral home do so, you may wish to ask if they charge for submitting claims.
- Other than for sea burial, there are NO casket requirements for routine body burial.
- 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. The undertaker must supply a container more durable than cardboard, unless the body is to be cremated.
- “No-fee” passports are available for family visiting overseas gravesites or memorials.
- You may ask the National Cemetery System 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. 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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