

Veterans' Benefits and Assistance

Questions:

Does the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provide benefits to cover all the funeral or cremation arrangements of an honorably discharged veteran?

- What documentation do I need to verify military service?
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Answers:

Does the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provide benefits to cover all the funeral or cremation arrangements of an honorably discharged veteran?

No. There is a common belief that the VA pays for all the funeral or cremation arrangements of an honorably discharged veteran. There are certain monetary, recognition, and service benefits that may be available. However, reimbursement for funeral or cremation service expenses is limited, and usually only applies to veterans who:

- retired from the Armed Services, or
- were disabled due to a service-related injury, or
- died in a VA hospital or while in a nursing home under VA contract
- Standard guidelines are provided as an overview, but only the VA can rule on your exact benefits.

What documentation do I need to verify military service?

A "Report of Separation From the Armed Forces of the United States" (discharge papers) is normally required to verify military service.

In most cases, this report is the "DD 214". If this report or its equivalent is not available, a "Request Pertaining to Military Records, Standard Form 180", can be sent to the Military National Personnel

Record Center. A copy of the Report of Separation will be mailed to the veteran, deceased veteran's next of kin or other persons or organizations that are authorized to receive it. If you do not have the DD 214 at the time of death, any of our Funeral Homes will help you secure one.

Who is eligible for a United States flag?

Most veterans are eligible for a United States flag. However, only one flag may be provided per veteran. A flag is provided at no cost to drape the casket or accompany the urn of a deceased veteran. Generally, the flag is given to the next of kin. Upon the request of the family, an "Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes" (VA Form 21-2008) must be submitted along with a copy of the veteran's discharge papers. Flags may be obtained from VA regional offices and most U.S. Post Offices or any of our Funeral Homes.

How is a military funeral honors ceremony scheduled?

As of January 1, 2000, and upon the family's request, the law requires that every eligible veteran receive a military funeral honors ceremony, which includes the folding and presentation of the United States flag and the playing of "Taps." The ceremony is performed by a military funeral honors detail consisting of two or more uniformed military persons and at least one person who is a member of the veteran's branch of the Armed Forces. This Department of Defense program calls for the funeral home director to request military funeral honors on behalf of the veteran's family. Memorial Park Funeral Homes work with various veteran's organizations to assist in the provision of military funeral honors.

Am I entitled to a free veteran's casket?

No. As a standard policy, neither the VA nor the various branches of service provide a free casket for a deceased veteran, unless death occurs while on active duty.

How does my family obtain a "Presidential Memorial Certificate?"

Initiated in March 1962 by President John F. Kennedy, a "Presidential Memorial Certificate" is an engraved paper certificate, signed by the current President, to honor the memory of honorably discharged, deceased veterans. Eligible recipients of the certificate include the deceased veteran's next of kin and loved ones. More than one certificate may be requested. Eligible recipients, or someone acting on their behalf, may apply in person at any VA regional office or by U.S. mail.

Are there monetary burial benefits available if I choose not to be buried in a VA National Cemetery?

Veterans buried in a private cemetery may be eligible to receive a partial reimbursement for their burial costs. For non-service related deaths, a burial expense allowance (up to \$300) and a plot allowance (up to \$300) may be given. If a death is service related, benefits up to \$2,000 may be paid for burial expenses. In order to be eligible to receive a VA burial allowance you must meet the following conditions:

payment for the veteran's burial was made without any reimbursement from a government agency or other source and,

- the veteran was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable
- In addition, at least one of the following conditions must be met:
- the veteran died because of a service related disability, or
- the veteran was receiving VA pension or compensation, or
- the veteran died in a VA hospital or nursing home under VA contract In order to determine the final reimbursement amount, an "Application for Burial Benefits" (VA Form 21-530) must be submitted within two years from the date of the veteran's permanent burial.

Who is eligible for burial in a VA National Cemetery

In general, any member of the Armed Forces of the United States who dies while on active duty or any veteran who was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable is entitled to burial in a VA National Cemetery. Under certain conditions, the spouse or un-remarried surviving spouse and minor children of an eligible person are also entitled to this benefit. Burial in a VA National Cemetery includes:

- an assigned gravesite (if space is available)
- opening and closing of the grave
- a grave liner for casketed remains
- a government headstone or marker
- perpetual care at no cost to the family
- Cremated remains are buried or inurned in VA National Cemeteries in the same manner and with the same honors as casketed remains.

How does my family request a marker or headstone for a burial space in a private cemetery?

Any deceased veteran discharged under conditions other than dishonorable is eligible for a standard Government headstone or marker. The VA, upon request, and at no charge to the applicant, will furnish a Government headstone or marker for the grave of any deceased eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world. For all deaths occurring before December 27, 2001, the VA may provide a headstone or marker only for graves not marked with a private headstone. Flat markers are available in granite, marble, and bronze and upright headstones in granite and marble. The style must be consistent with existing monuments or markers at the place of burial. Niche markers for cremated remains are also available. An "Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker for Installation in a Private or State Veteran's Cemetery" (VA Form 40-1330) must be submitted.

How do I request the issuance or replacement of military service medals, awards and decorations?

Military service medals, awards, and decorations are available from the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) which is under the jurisdiction of the National Archives and Records Administration. Family members may request medals and awards for living veterans only if they have obtained their signed authorization. For deceased veterans, requests will be accepted from the next-of-kin (unremarried widow or widower, son or daughter, father or mother, brother or sister of the deceased veteran). Requests should be submitted in writing to the appropriate military service branch division of the NPRC. Standard Form (SF 180), available through the VA, is recommended to submit your request. Generally, there is no charge for medal or award replacements. For more information, or for the mailing address for military branch office in which to submit your request, please call 314-538-2050 or visit their website at www.nara.gov.