

Chapter 8

Burial and Memorial Benefits

Veterans discharged from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable; Servicemembers who die while on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training; and spouses and dependent children of Veterans and active duty service members, may be eligible for VA burial and memorial benefits. (For the purposes of this chapter, the term "Veteran" includes eligible persons who die during active duty service.) The Veteran does not have to die before a spouse or dependent child can be eligible for burial or memorial benefits.

Burial in VA National Cemeteries

Burial in a VA national cemetery is available for eligible Veterans, spouses and dependents at no cost and includes the gravesite, grave-liner, opening and closing of the grave, a headstone or marker, and perpetual care as part of a national shrine. For Veterans, benefits may also include a burial flag (with case for active duty), and military funeral honors.

With certain exceptions, active duty service beginning after Sept. 7, 1980, as an enlisted person, and after Oct. 16, 1981, as an officer, must be for a minimum of 24 consecutive months or the full period of active duty (as in the case of reservists or National Guard members called to active duty for a limited duration). Active duty for training, by itself, while serving in the reserves or National Guard, is not sufficient to confer eligibility. Reservists and National Guard members, as well as their spouses and dependent children, are eligible if they were entitled to retired pay at the time of death, or would have been upon reaching requisite age. See Chapter 8 for more information.

Certain otherwise eligible individuals found to have committed federal or state capital crimes are barred from burial or memorialization in a VA national cemetery, and from receipt of Government-furnished headstones, markers, medallions, burial flags, and Presidential Memorial Certificates. Veterans and other claimants for VA burial benefits have the right to appeal decisions made by VA regarding eligibility for national cemetery burial or other memorial benefits. Chapter 13

discusses the procedures for appealing VA claims. This chapter contains information on the full range of VA burial and memorial benefits. Readers with questions may contact the nearest national cemetery, listed by state in the VA Facilities section of this book, call 1-800-827-1000, or visit the web site at www.cem.va.gov/.

Surviving spouses of Veterans who died on or after Jan. 1, 2000, do not lose eligibility for burial in a national cemetery if they remarry. Unmarried dependent children of Veterans who are under 21 years of age, or under 23 years of age if a full-time student at an approved educational institution, are eligible for burial. Unmarried adult children who become physically or mentally disabled and incapable of self-support before age 21, or age 23 if a full-time student, also are eligible.

Certain Parents of servicemembers who die as a result of hostile activity or from combat training-related injuries may be eligible for burial in a national cemetery with their child. The biological or adopted parents of a servicemember who died in combat or while performing training in preparation for a combat mission, who leaves no surviving spouse or dependent child, may be buried with the deceased servicemember if there is available space. Eligibility is limited to servicemembers who died on or after Oct. 7, 2001, and biological or adoptive parents who died on or after Oct. 13, 2010.

The next of kin or authorized representative (e.g., funeral director) makes interment arrangements at time of need by contacting the National Cemetery Scheduling Office (see information available at <http://www.cem.va.gov/bbene/need.asp>) or, in some cases, the national cemetery in which burial is desired. VA normally does not conduct burials on weekends. Gravesites cannot be reserved; however, VA will honor reservations made before 1973 by the Department of the Army.

VA's National Cemetery Scheduling Office or local national cemetery directors verify eligibility for burial. A copy of the Veteran's discharge document that specifies the period(s) of active duty and character of service is usually sufficient to determine eligibility. A copy of the deceased's death certificate and proof of relationship to the Veteran (for eligible family members) may be required.

VA operates 131 national cemeteries, of which 72 are currently

open for both new casket and cremation interments and 18 may accept new interment of cremated remains only. Burial options are limited to those available at a specific cemetery and may include in-ground casket, or interment of cremated remains in a columbarium, in-ground, or in a scattering area. Contact the national cemetery directly, or visit our website at <http://www.cem.va.gov> to determine if a particular cemetery is open for new burials, and what other options are available.

Headstones, Markers and Medallions

Veterans, Veterans, active duty service members, and retired Reservists and National Guard service members, are eligible for an inscribed headstone or marker for their unmarked grave at any cemetery – national, state veterans, tribal, or private. VA will deliver a headstone or marker at no cost, anywhere in the world.

For eligible Veterans or service members buried in a private cemetery whose deaths occurred on or after Nov. 1, 1990, VA may furnish a government headstone or marker (even if the grave is already marked with a private one); or VA may furnish a medallion to affix to an already existing privately-purchased headstone or marker.

Spouses and dependent children are eligible for a government headstone or marker only if they are buried in a national or State Veterans cemetery.

Flat markers are available in bronze, granite or marble. Upright headstones come in granite or marble. The style provided will be consistent with existing monuments at the place of burial. Niche markers are available to mark columbaria used for inurnment of cremated remains. Medallions are made of bronze and are available in three sizes: 5-inch, 3-inch, and 1 ½-inches. Headstones, markers and medallions previously furnished by the government may be replaced at the government's expense if badly deteriorated, illegible, vandalized or stolen.

Headstones or markers for VA national cemeteries will be ordered by the cemetery director using information provided by the next of kin or authorized representative.

Headstones or Markers for private cemeteries: Before ordering, the next of kin or authorized representative should check with the

cemetery to ensure that the Government-furnished headstone or marker will be accepted. All installation fees at private cemeteries are the responsibility of the applicant. To submit a claim for a headstone or marker for a gravesite in a private cemetery, use VA Form 40-1330, Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker (available at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/>). A copy of the Veteran's military discharge document is required. Mail forms to Memorial Programs Service, Department of Veterans Affairs, 5109 Russell Road, Quantico, VA 22134-3903. The form and supporting documents may also be faxed toll free to 1-800-455-7143.

"In Memory Of" Markers: VA provides memorial headstones and markers with "In Memory Of" as the first line of inscription for those whose remains have not been recovered or identified, were buried at sea, donated to science or cremated and scattered. Eligibility is the same as for regular headstones and markers. There is no fee when the "In Memory Of" marker is placed in a national cemetery. All installation fees at private cemeteries are the responsibility of the applicant. Memorial headstones/markers for spouses and dependents can be provided only for placement in a national or State veterans cemetery.

Inscriptions: Headstones and markers must be inscribed with the name of the deceased, branch of service, and year of birth and death. They also may be inscribed with other optional information, including an emblem of belief and, space permitting, additional text including military rank; war service such as "World War II;" complete dates of birth and death; military awards; military organizations; civilian or Veteran affiliations; and personalized words of endearment.

Medallion in lieu of government headstone or marker for private cemeteries: For Veterans or service members whose death occurred on or after Nov. 1, 1990, VA is authorized to provide a medallion instead of a headstone or marker if the grave is in a private cemetery and already marked with a privately-purchased headstone or marker. To submit a claim for a medallion to be affixed to a private headstone/marker in a private cemetery, use VA Form 40-1330M, Claim for Government Medallion (available at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/>). A copy of the Veteran's military discharge document is required. Mail forms to Memorial Programs Service, Department of Veterans Affairs, 5109 Russell Road, Quantico, VA 22134-3903. The form and supporting documents may also be faxed toll free to 1-800-

455-7143.

To check the status of a claim for a headstone or marker for placement in a national, state, or tribal Veterans cemetery, please call the cemetery. To check the status of one being placed in a private cemetery, please contact the Applicant Assistance Unit at 1-800-697-6947 or via email at mps.headstone@va.gov.

Other Memorialization

Presidential Memorial Certificates are issued to recognize the military service of honorably discharged deceased Veterans and persons who died in the active military, naval, or air service. Next of kin, relatives and other loved ones may apply for a certificate by mailing, or faxing a completed and signed VA Form 40-0247, Presidential Memorial Certificate Request Form (available at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/>), along with a copy of the Veteran's military discharge documents or proof of honorable military service. The processing of requests sent without supporting documents will be delayed until eligibility can be determined. Eligibility requirements can be found at www.cem.va.gov.

Burial Flags: Generally, VA will furnish a U.S. burial flag to memorialize Veterans who received an other than dishonorable discharge. This includes certain persons who served in the organized military forces of the Commonwealth of the Philippines while in service of the U.S. armed forces and who died on or after April 25, 1951. Also eligible for a burial flag are Veterans who were entitled to retired pay for service in the Reserve or National Guard, or would have been entitled if over age 60; and members or former members of the Selected Reserve who served their initial obligation, or were discharged for a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty, or died while a member of the Selected Reserve. The next of kin may apply for the flag at any VA regional office or U.S. Post Office by completing VA Form 21-2008, Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes (available at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/>). In most cases, a funeral director will help the family obtain the flag.

Reimbursement of Burial Expenses: VA will pay a burial allowance up to \$2,000 if the Veteran's death is service-connected. In such cases, the person who bore the Veteran's burial expenses may claim reimbursement from VA.

In some cases, VA will pay the cost of transporting the remains of a Veteran whose death was service-connected to the nearest national cemetery with available gravesites. There is no time limit for filing reimbursement claims in service-connected death cases.

Burial Allowance: VA will pay a burial and funeral allowance of up to \$2,000 for Veterans who die from service-connected causes. VA will pay a burial and funeral allowance of up to \$300 for Veterans who, at the time of death from nonservice-connected causes, were entitled to receive pension or compensation or would have been entitled if they were not receiving military retirement pay. VA will pay a burial and funeral allowance of up to \$722 when the Veteran's death occurs in a VA facility, a VA-contracted nursing home or a state Veterans nursing home. In cases in which the Veteran's death was not service connected, claims must be filed within two years after burial or cremation.

Plot Allowance: VA will pay a plot allowance of up to \$722 when a Veteran is buried in a cemetery not under U.S. government jurisdiction if: the Veteran was discharged from active duty because of disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty; the Veteran was receiving compensation or pension or would have been if the Veteran was not receiving military retired pay; or the Veteran died in a VA facility. The plot allowance may be paid to the state for the cost of a plot or interment in a state-owned cemetery reserved solely for Veteran burials if the Veteran is buried without charge. Burial expenses paid by the deceased's employer or a state agency will not be reimbursed.

Military Funeral Honors: Upon request, DoD will provide military funeral honors consisting of folding and the presenting of the United States flag and the playing of "Taps." A funeral honors detail consists of two or more uniformed members of the armed forces, with at least one member from the deceased's branch of service.

Family members should inform their funeral director if they want military funeral honors. DoD maintains a toll-free number (1-877-MIL-HONR) for use by funeral directors only to request honors. VA can help arrange honors for burials at VA national cemeteries. Veterans service organizations or volunteer groups may help provide honors. For more information, visit www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil/.

Veterans Cemeteries Administered by Other Agencies

Department of the Army: Administers Arlington National Cemetery and other Army installation cemeteries. Eligibility is generally more restrictive than at VA national cemeteries. For information, call (703) 607-8000, write Superintendent, Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, VA 22211, or visit www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/.

Department of the Interior: Administers two active national cemeteries – Andersonville National Cemetery in Georgia and Andrew Johnson National Cemetery in Tennessee. Eligibility is similar to VA national cemeteries. For information, call (202) 208-4747, write Department of Interior, National Park Service 1849 C. St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

State and Tribal Veterans Cemeteries: Currently 87 state and four Tribal Veterans cemeteries offer burial options for Veterans and their families. These cemeteries have similar eligibility requirements and some require state residency. Some services, particularly for family members, may require a fee. Contact the state or tribal veterans cemetery or the state veterans affairs office for information. To locate a State or Tribal Veterans cemetery, visit www.cem.va.gov/cem/scg/lsvc.asp.