

Veteran's Burial Benefits "What You Get, and What You Don't Get" - Many veterans are under the impression that their status as a veteran means that the government will pay for their burial. This is not true and it can cause great financial hardship for families who don't understand it at a time when they are least prepared to deal with it.

It is very important that veterans have their discharge papers located in a secure place known to their next of kin. Eligibility for potential burial benefits depends on these documents, and they cannot always be obtained quickly from government sources.

To be eligible for burial benefits, a veteran must have been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. Certain other factors including time period and length of service may apply, so the family should contact the VA at 1-800-827-1000 for final determination of eligibility.

Burial benefits available include a gravesite in any of VA's 131 national cemeteries, as well as in state- owned- and- operated veteran's cemeteries.

For veterans interred at a national or state veteran's cemetery, the opening and closing of the grave and perpetual care are provided at no cost. If buried at a private cemetery, the family must pay these costs, as well as the cost of the plot and any related expenses.

The VA will provide a burial flag, a government marker, and a Presidential Memorial Certificate, regardless of where the veteran is buried.

If burial is to take place in a national or state veteran's cemetery, the cemetery will make the arrangements for the interment only. Neither the cemetery nor the VA makes funeral arrangements or performs cremations.

It is the responsibility of the veteran's family to make arrangements for funeral services with a funeral home, including memorial services, viewings, preparing and transporting the remains, the casket, etc.

Any items or services obtained from a funeral home will be at the family's expense, including the plot and grave provisions if the veteran is not buried in a national or state cemetery. The VA does not pay for any expenses related to a veteran's burial or funeral.

Certain survivors may apply for a monetary burial allowance paid after-the-fact by the VA, but generally only if the veteran was in receipt of VA disability compensation or pension at the time of death, or if the veteran died while hospitalized by VA or while receiving care under VA contract at a non-VA facility.

The amount payable depends on whether the veteran's death was related to a military service-connected disability, with the payments ranging from \$300 to \$2,000.

There are other factors that can affect potential eligibility for this benefit, so veterans or their families should contact the VA at the 800 number above or your county veterans service officer for more information prior to actually needing the information.