

HANDLING ESTATE MATTERS

DEATH CERTIFICATES AND BURIAL BENEFITS

This section describes how surviving family members may obtain a death certificate of a deceased service member and qualify for any available burial benefits.

To obtain copies of the death certificate, surviving family members should contact their CAO or write to the National Personnel Records Center (Military Personnel Records), 9700 Page Ave., St. Louis, MO 63132-5100.

To contact a CAO with the appropriate branch, call:

U.S. Army (703) 325-7990
U.S. Marine Corps (703) 784-9513
U.S. Navy (703) 614-7613
U.S. Air Force (800) 433-0048
U.S. Coast Guard (202) 267-1648

Death Certificates

What is the purpose of obtaining a death certificate?

Proof of death of the service member is required in order for surviving family members to claim many of the military and civilian benefits that are available. This includes, for example, Social Security benefits. Military death certificates are produced on DD Form 1300, Report of Casualty.

How do surviving family members obtain a copy of the deceased service member's death certificate?

Usually the military will provide the Casualty Assistance Officer (CAO) with a copy of the death certificate within 10 working days of a death, and the CAO will deliver the certificate to surviving family members. Surviving family members should make copies of the death certificate which will be needed in a variety of situations as proof of death; death certificates are not available from the same sources that provide other types of military records such as discharges or medical records.

Burial Arrangements

Receiving the Remains

What is the military's procedure for handling remains?

The CAO will work with the Military Medical Support Office to coordinate the delivery of the remains. Surviving family members should notify their CAO of the location of any burial and funeral services. Remains will be transported to that location at government expense generally within 7 to 10 days in the case of a death overseas. However, transportation could take longer depending on the circumstances of the conflict.

Requests for burial in Arlington National Cemetery should be made to the Superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery by calling (703) 607-8585.

For a list of national veterans cemeteries, visit www.cem.va.gov/nchp.htm.

For a list of state veterans cemeteries, visit www.cem.va.gov/lsvc.htm.



Will an autopsy be performed on the remains?

An autopsy is performed anytime a service member has been killed in action if the medical examiner of the armed services believes it is necessary in order to determine the cause of death. The consent of the surviving family members is not required. Family members may obtain a copy of any autopsy report by contacting their CAO.

Will the military conduct an investigation into the circumstances of the death?

Under certain circumstances, the military will conduct an investigation into the casualty incident, but the military does not conduct an investigation in all instances. If there is an investigation, family members may request copies of any investigation or accident report by contacting their CAO.

Veterans Cemeteries

Who can be buried in a veterans cemetery?

All service members who die while on active duty and former service members who have received a discharge under conditions other than dishonorable may be buried in any Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemetery if there is space available. National cemeteries offer a variety of gravesite options, although not all are available at every cemetery. The surviving family members may either directly, or through a funeral director, select and contact the national cemetery to make the arrangements.

Eligible spouses and dependents may be buried with the service member in a national cemetery, including Arlington National Cemetery, at no cost to the family.

Benefits at state veterans cemeteries are similar. Residence in the state in which the cemetery is located may also be required.

Is burial at a veterans cemetery required for surviving family members to receive funeral benefits?

No. The deceased service member does not need to be buried in a veterans cemetery in order for surviving family members to receive funeral benefits from the military.

Funeral Services

May deceased service members have a military funeral?

Yes. However, a military funeral is not required even when the service takes place in a veterans cemetery.

What is included in a military funeral?

A military funeral includes the presence of an honor guard, the presentation of the United States burial flag and the playing of Taps.

Whom should surviving family members contact to arrange for a military funeral?

If the deceased service member is being buried at a VA national cemetery, the national cemetery staff can assist with those arrangements. Otherwise, the funeral home director, private cemetery or state veterans cemetery can assist.

American Flag

Does the VA provide a burial flag?

Yes. The VA provides a flag, at no cost, to drape the casket or accompany the urn of a deceased veteran. The CAO, the National Cemetery Administration or a funeral director should be able to assist in obtaining a burial flag.

Burial and Funeral Benefits

What types of expenses incurred in connection with burials or funerals will the military pay for?

The military will provide reimbursement for the following types of primary expenses: costs for removal, embalming, casket, clothing, dressing, cosmetic/restorative procedures, permits, air tray, cremation, urn and engraving. The current regulations prescribe a maximum reimbursement amount of \$1,750.

In addition, secondary expenses may be paid for, including costs for: professional services, services of a house of worship, limousines, gratuities, an obituary notice, memorial items, a grave plot, cemetery labor, a headstone or marker, and a vault/outer enclosure. The current regulations prescribe a maximum amount of:

- (1) \$4,325 for interment in a private cemetery;
- (2) \$3,000 for interment in a national cemetery;
- (3) \$3,000 for cremation;
- (4) \$5,550 when burial is in a national cemetery and surviving family members refuse all military mortuary services and assume responsibility for all arrangements, services, transportation, and related expenses; and
- (5) \$6,900 when burial is in a private cemetery and surviving family members refuse all military mortuary services and assume responsibility for all arrangements, services, transportation, and related expenses.

What is the application process to receive burial and funeral benefits?

In order to apply for burial and funeral expense reimbursement, the individual who incurred the expenses, or the funeral director who rendered the services, must complete an application for reimbursement.

A hardwood flag case may be available to display the flag used in the funeral. For an application and information on how to obtain a flag case, contact either the CAO or the Military Medical Support Office, Post Office Box 886999, Great Lakes, IL, 60088-6999 or (800) 876-1131, ext. 628.

A Presidential Memorial Certificate, an engraved paper certificate signed by the President and expressing the country's gratitude for the sacrifices made by the deceased service member, is available upon request. More than one certificate may be obtained. For more information call (202) 565-4964 or email PMC@mail.va.gov.



A variety of government-designed headstones are available through the VA. Headstone options may be viewed at www.cem.va.gov/hm.htm.

For more information on obtaining burial benefits visit the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration website at www.cem.va.gov or call (800) 827-1000.



The application will require proof of military service, such as a DD Form 1300, Report of Casualty, or, in the case of a deceased veteran, a DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge From Active Duty, a death certificate, and copies of the funeral and burial bills. Once processed, surviving family members will receive a check to reimburse them for the eligible expenses. This claim must be filed within two years of the funeral service.

For more information, and to obtain copies of the reimbursement application, please refer to www.vba.va.gov or call (800) 827-1000.

Viewing the Remains

May the family view the remains?

Generally, families should be allowed to follow their religious, cultural or ethnic traditions and their personal beliefs when it comes to viewing the remains. Under most circumstances, the military will provide the family with information as to the condition of the remains. In some cases, the military may recommend that the remains are not viewable, which is an assessment that they are not suitable for public viewing. This determination is not a prohibition to the family viewing the remains. Surviving family members should contact their CAO for specific policies concerning the viewing of the remains.

Headstones

Is there assistance available to help with the expense of headstones or markers?

Upon request, the VA will furnish a government headstone or marker for the grave of the deceased service member at no charge.

These government headstones or markers will be inscribed with the name of the individual, branch of service and years of birth and death. Additionally, the following optional items may also be inscribed using available space: rank or rate; war service; months and days of birth and death; a religious emblem; text indicating any valor awards; and a term of endearment subject to approval by the VA.

In a veterans cemetery, the headstone is erected at no cost and ordered by cemetery officials based on information provided by the surviving family. To request a headstone for a private cemetery, the surviving family member or a representative of the family, such as a funeral director, should submit a VA Form 40-1330, Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker, along with proof of military service, such as a DD Form 1300, Report of Casualty, or, in the case of a deceased veteran, a DD Form 214, Certificate of Release or Discharge From Active Duty. The surviving family members must pay the installation cost at a private cemetery, but the VA will pay for shipment of the headstone.

Shipment of Personal Effects and Household Goods

Will the military arrange for shipment of the deceased service member's personal effects and household goods?

The military will collect, safeguard and inventory the personal effects of a deceased service member and transport them to a designated recipient, such as the surviving spouse, the eldest child or the parent who directs the disposition of the remains according to an order of precedence. Ownership of the property will be governed by the laws of the state in which the service member maintained legal residency.

Similarly, the military generally will pay for the shipment of the household goods of the deceased service member to approved locations. See the section on General Monetary Assistance for more information.

Other Resources

Are there other resources on obtaining burial benefits?

The CAO should have all of the information about the burial benefits. Another resource for some items is the Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration.

