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When a Veteran Passes Away

A Planning Guide for the Surviving Family



Produced By:

The New York State Tribute Foundation, Inc., an affiliate of the New York State Funeral Directors Association, Inc.

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When a Veteran Passes Away

One of the more difficult tasks a surviving family may face after the death of their beloved Veteran is identifying, locating, and completing the various claim forms required to obtain survivors' benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The anxiety and fear of the unknown — who to call, what to do or where to go for help — can be a daunting experience.

To avoid such a situation, and to ensure that those who have proudly served our nation receive all the benefits to which they are entitled, Veterans and their families are encouraged to **organize their personal and military records as part of their regular estate planning**. While your funeral director can assist you with the necessary paperwork at the time of need, gathering and storing these important documents now will help ease the burden when a death occurs.

Veterans of the United States armed forces may be eligible for a broad range of programs and services provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Eligibility for most VA benefits is based upon discharge from active military service under other than dishonorable conditions. Reservists and National Guard members, as well as their spouses and dependent children, may also be eligible for VA burial and memorial benefits if they were entitled to retirement pay at the time of death, or would have been if they had been over age 60.



Important Documents

The following documents will be needed when applying for benefits related to a Veteran's death:

- Veteran's discharge certificate (DD Form 214) or DD Form 1300 "Report of Casualty" (provided by your Service Casualty Office)
- Veteran's Social Security number
- Veteran's Death Certificate (if the Veteran did not die in a VA health care facility)
- Veteran's Birth Certificate (to determine parents' benefits)
- Marriage Certificate
- Divorce Decree(s) (if any)
- Birth certificate, adoption and/or custody documents for each of the Veteran's children
- Social Security numbers for all family members
- Wills and Deeds of Trust
- Government life insurance policies

Any claim for VA benefits should be filed as promptly as possible to ensure the earliest effective date of awarding benefits. **It is also important to locate discharge papers prior to the time of death occurring to prevent delays in scheduling funeral services.** Be sure to share with your family where these documents are stored.

Military Records

Veterans and next-of-kin of deceased Veterans have the right to fully access their military records. Next-of-kin include the surviving spouse who has not remarried, children, parents, or siblings of the deceased Veteran. Most Veterans and their next-of-kin can obtain free copies of their military records by visiting www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records.

eBenefits is an online portal that provides resources and self-service capabilities to servicemembers, Veterans, and their families to apply, research, access, and manage their VA and military benefits and personal information through a secure Internet connection. Veterans and their families may register for an *eBenefits* account at www.ebenefits.va.gov.

Federal (VA) Burial and Memorial Benefits

Veterans discharged from active duty under conditions other than dishonorable and servicemembers who die while on active duty, active duty for training, as well as the spouses and dependent children of Veterans and active duty servicemembers, may be eligible for VA burial and memorial benefits.

These benefits include:

- **Burial in a VA National Cemetery** — Eligible Veterans, their spouses and dependents can be buried in a VA National Cemetery at no cost to the family.
- **Headstones, Markers, and Medallions** — Eligible Veterans are provided with an inscribed headstone, marker, or medallion at no cost to the family.
- **Presidential Memorial Certificate** — To recognize and honor the military service of honorably discharged deceased Veterans, this certificate is issued upon request of the family.
- **Military Funeral Honors** — At the family's request, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) will provide military funeral honors consisting of folding and presentation of the U.S. flag and the playing of "Taps."
- **Burial Flag** — An American flag can drape an eligible Veteran's casket; your funeral director will obtain a flag from the VA.
- **Reimbursement of Burial Expenses** — If the family has already paid for the Veteran's burial or funeral, and has not been reimbursed by another government agency or some other source (such as the deceased Veteran's employer), the VA may reimburse the family for their out-of-pocket expenses.



Burial in a VA National Cemetery

Burial in a VA national cemetery is available for eligible Veterans, their spouses and dependents at no cost to the family. Burial benefits at a national cemetery with available space includes the opening and closing of the grave, a headstone or marker, government liner for casketed remains and perpetual care as part of a national shrine.

Burial options are limited to those available at a specific cemetery, but may include in-ground casket, interment of cremated remains in a columbarium, or in a scatter garden. Gravesites cannot be reserved, and the VA does not normally conduct burials on weekends. Eligible spouses and dependents may be buried even if they predecease the Veteran.

Your funeral director will work with the National Cemetery Scheduling Office to make burial arrangements in a National Cemetery. Visit this website to see if your loved one is eligible to be buried in a National Cemetery: www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits/eligible.asp.

Arlington National Cemetery

The scheduling process at Arlington National Cemetery is different than any other VA National Cemetery. There are extended wait times to schedule burial and cremation services.

Note for Cremated Remains: Families will be required to validate that an urn contains 100 percent of the decedent's remains received from the crematorium or funeral home before Arlington National Cemetery conducts the burial service. Your funeral director will provide you with information specific to Arlington National Cemetery.

National Cemeteries in New York State

- **Bath National Cemetery** (Bath)
- **Calverton National Cemetery** (Calverton)
- **Cypress Hills National Cemetery** (Brooklyn)
- **Long Island National Cemetery*** (Farmingdale)
- **Gerald B.H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery** (Schuylerville)
- **Woodlawn National Cemetery*** (Elmira)

*These cemeteries have space available for cremated remains in a columbarium only. However, casketed remains of subsequent family members in the same gravesite of a previously interred family member may be accommodated.

Burial in a Private Cemetery

Burial benefits available for Veterans buried in a private cemetery may include a Government headstone, marker or medallion, a burial flag and a Presidential Memorial Certificate at no cost to the family. Some Veterans may also be eligible for Burial Allowances. VA benefits are not available to spouses and dependents buried in a private cemetery.

Burial by Sea

The United States Navy offers a program for a Veteran that requests a sea burial. Burial at Sea is a method of final disposition of casketed or cremated remains that is performed on United States Navy vessels. The committal ceremony is performed while the ship is deployed; therefore, family members are not allowed to be present. The commanding officer of the ship assigned to perform the ceremony will notify the family of the date, time, and longitude and latitude once the committal service has been completed.

Eligibility:

- Active duty members of the uniform services
- Retirees and veterans who were honorably discharged
- U.S. civilian marine personnel of the Military Sealift Command
- Dependent family members of active duty personnel, retirees, and veterans of the uniformed services



Burial Allowance

VA burial allowances are flat rate monetary benefits that are generally paid at the maximum amount authorized by law for an eligible Veteran's burial and funeral costs. A VA regulation change in 2014 simplified the program to process payments for eligible survivors quickly and efficiently. Automatic payments are now made to the eligible surviving spouse upon notification of the Veteran's death, without the need to submit a claim. The VA may grant additional benefits, including the plot or interment allowance and transportation allowance, if it receives a claim for these benefits.

For service-related deaths, the VA will pay a maximum amount of \$2,000 toward burial. If the Veteran is buried in a VA national cemetery, some or all of the cost of transporting the deceased to the nearest national cemetery with available gravesites may be reimbursed. There is no time limit for filing reimbursement claims in service-related deaths.

When the cause of death is not service-related, the reimbursements are generally described as two payments: a burial/funeral expense allowance and a plot/interment allowance.

Your funeral director can help determine if your Veteran is eligible for a burial allowance. A complete list of eligibility requirements is available at www.benefits.va.gov.

Presidential Memorial Certificates

A Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) is an engraved paper certificate to honor the memory of honorably discharged Veterans who have died. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) prepares the certificate which allows the current President to express the country's grateful recognition of the Veteran's service in the United States Armed Forces. Eligible recipients include the next of kin and loved ones of honorably discharged deceased Veterans; more than one certificate may be provided. Starting in 2020, a PMC will automatically be presented to a Veteran's next-of-kin at burial if the Veteran is buried in a national cemetery.

To request a Presidential Memorial Certificate, eligible recipients (or someone acting on their behalf) may apply at any VA regional office or by using VA Form 40-0247. A copy of the Veteran's military discharge document (DD-214) along with a photocopy of the death certificate must be provided when submitting the request.

Headstones, Markers and Medallions

Veterans, active duty service members, and retired Reservists and National Guard service members are eligible for an inscribed headstone, marker, or medallion for their grave at any cemetery – national, state veterans, or private. Headstones and markers are provided for eligible spouses and dependents of Veterans only if they are buried in a national or state Veterans cemetery.

The VA may furnish a government headstone or marker even if the grave is already marked with a private one, or the VA may furnish a medallion instead of a headstone or marker for Veterans' graves in private cemeteries when the grave is already marked with a privately-purchased headstone or marker.

Your funeral director can help you obtain VA Form 40-1330 and 40-1330M - Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker and Claim for Government Medallion for Placement in a Private Cemetery. There is no charge for the headstone or marker itself, however arrangements for placing it in a private cemetery are the family's responsibility and all setting fees are at private expense.



Military Funeral Honors

“Honoring Those Who Served” is the national program for providing dignified military funeral honors to Veterans who have defended our nation. Upon the family’s request, every eligible Veteran may receive a military funeral honors ceremony to include folding and presenting the United States burial flag and the playing of Taps. A military funeral honors detail will consist of two or more uniformed military persons, with at least one being a member of the Veteran’s parent service of the armed forces; Veterans’ service organizations or volunteer groups may help provide honors.

Your funeral director will request military funeral honors on behalf of the Veteran’s family from either the U.S. Dept. of Defense, NYS Division of Military and Naval Affairs (DMNA) or the NY National Guard. It is important to inform your funeral director immediately if you would like a Military Honors Ceremony since it often takes 48 hours to process and implement a request for an honors ceremony.

Burial Flags

A United States flag is provided, at no cost, to drape the casket or accompany the urn of a deceased Veteran who



honorably served in the U.S. Armed Forces. A flag is provided as a symbol of honor and remembrance of a Veteran's military service to his or her country. Generally, after its use at the funeral service, the flag is presented to the next-of-kin as a keepsake. When there is no next-of-kin, a close friend may receive a flag from the VA.

Your funeral director will assist you in obtaining a flag from the local U.S. Post Office or a regional VA office.

For national VA cemeteries with an Avenue of Flags, a Veteran's family may donate the burial flag of their loved one to be flown on patriotic holidays. Families may also choose to donate a Veteran's burial flag to Avenue of Flags at a VA national cemetery. The Avenue displays burial flags donated by the families of deceased Veterans on patriotic holidays and during special events. A Certificate of Appreciation is presented to the donor for providing their loved ones' burial flag to a national cemetery. Please contact the cemetery of your choice for information on how to donate a Veteran's burial flag.

NYS Supplemental Burial Allowance

To honor servicemembers who gave their lives in combat, New York State offers surviving family members a Supplemental Burial Allowance of up to \$6,000. This allowance is used to defray funeral and burial expenses not covered by the federal government. A family member must bear part or all costs of the servicemember's funeral and/or interment to be eligible.

Applications for the Supplemental Burial Allowance are available online at www.veterans.ny.gov, by calling the NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs helpline at: 888.838.7697, or from any of the State Veterans Counseling Offices.



VET Centers in New York State

Vet Centers are community-based facilities that offer a wide range of free services to Veterans and their families, including bereavement counseling, outreach and education and assistance with benefits. There are Vet Centers located throughout New York State, including:

- Albany
- Babylon
- Binghamton
- Bronx
- Brooklyn
- Buffalo
- Hicksville
- Middletown
- New York - Harlem
- New York - Manhattan
- Rochester
- Staten Island
- Syracuse
- Watertown
- White Plains
- Woodhaven - Queens

For eligibility or to learn more, visit: www.vetcenter.va.gov/index.asp or call a NYS Veterans Counselor at 888.838.7697 (VETSNYs).

County Benefits

Benefits vary with each county in New York State. Check with your County Veterans' Service Agency.

Miscellaneous Benefits

A Veterans counselor can answer questions about eligibility for benefits and the application procedures for any of the benefits available. A Veteran's family may also be entitled to additional benefits such as:

1. Dependency & Indemnity Compensation (DIC)
2. Death Pension
3. Home Loan Guaranties
4. VA Life Insurance
5. Department of Defense Death Gratuity
6. Health Insurance
7. Beneficiary Financial Counseling Services and Online Will Preparation
8. Education and Career Counseling for beneficiaries and families

For more information, visit: www.vba.va.gov or call 800.827.1000.

Veterans' Organizations

If your loved one was a member of a veterans' organization, such as the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), or Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), ask your funeral director to contact the organization's service representative to arrange for a ritual service and casket bearers.

The Patriot Guard Riders of New York are also available to provide escorts and stand flag lines at a memorial service. Made up of a large, diverse group of volunteers with sincere appreciation for the sacrifices made by our military and Veterans, this group provides a moving presence.

To request the presence of the Patriot Guard Riders, family members are encouraged to provide 48 hours' notice by visiting www.pgny.org.



Bereavement Counseling

The VA offers bereavement counseling to all immediate family members including spouses, children, parents, and siblings of servicemembers who die in the line of duty while on active service. This also includes federally-activated members of the National Guard and reserve components. VA's bereavement counseling is provided at no cost in community-based Vet Centers located near the family or can oftentimes be made available in the family's home or where the family feels most comfortable.

Families may request this service by visiting www.vetcenter.va.gov or by calling 202.461.6530.

Replacing Military Medals

Veterans and their families may apply free-of-charge to replace any medals awarded while in active service. Requests for replacement medals, decorations, and awards should be directed to the branch of the military in which the Veteran served. However, for Air Force (including Army Air Corps) and Army Veterans, the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) verifies awards and forwards requests and verification to appropriate services.

Requests for replacement medals should be submitted on Standard Form 180, "Request Pertaining to Military Records," which may be obtained at your local VA office or at www.va.gov/vaforms/. Call Military Personnel Records at 866.272.6272 for more information.

Additional Resources

	PHONE	WEB ADDRESS
National Cemetery Administration		www.cem.va.gov
NYS Division of Veterans' Affairs	888.838.7697	www.veterans.ny.gov
Presidential Memorial Certificate Program	202.565.4964	www.cem.va.gov/pmc.asp
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)	800.827.1000	www.va.gov
VA Bereavement Counseling	202.461.6530	www.va.gov/burials-memorials/bereavement-counseling
VA Financial Counseling & Online Will Preparation		https://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/bfcs.asp
VA Forms		www.va.gov/vaforms
VA Headstones and Markers	800.697.6947	https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/headstones-markers-medallions/
VA Life Insurance	800.669.8477	www.benefits.va.gov/insurance

New York State Tribute Foundation, Inc.

The Tribute Foundation was established to advance awareness related to death, dying and bereavement by fostering a better understanding of end-of-life issues for all New Yorkers and offering support to community members in everyday situations and during times of crisis. Committed to being an agent of change, the Foundation works creatively to define issues, provide a forum to exchange ideas and be a resource for information. Its philanthropic vision is guided by its investments in consumer education and outreach, industry research, education for lifelong learning, and partnerships and collaborations.

New York State Funeral Directors Association, Inc. (NYSFDA)

NYSFDA is one of the oldest associations of funeral directors in the United States. Comprised of over 900 funeral firms, NYSFDA is the largest organization representing the interests of large and small funeral firms in New York State. NYSFDA is the nationally recognized leader of state funeral directors' associations in the country, and is headquartered in Albany, New York.



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