



# HONORING YOUR SERVICE

*MOAA's Guide to Military Burials*





# INTRODUCTION

A military burial is a solemn occasion, a final salute in honor of service. While thinking about your own burial may be difficult, you and your family can gain peace of mind by being informed and making decisions ahead of time.

That is the purpose of this guide. Although accurate as of publication date, this is not an official publication of the uniformed services or any government agency. For official, up-to-date information and more details, visit [va.gov/burials-memorials](https://va.gov/burials-memorials).



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# U.S. MILITARY CEMETERIES: FROM 1862 TO THE PRESENT



**We have come to dedicate a portion  
of that field, as a final resting place....**

**– Abraham Lincoln**

With those words (and remarkably few more), President Abraham Lincoln dedicated the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, PA. Less than a year and a half earlier, on July 17, 1862, Lincoln had signed an act establishing national cemeteries "for the soldiers who shall die in the service of the country."

Over time, responsibility for these cemeteries has shifted, eligibility criteria have been enlarged, and the whole system has expanded dramatically. Today, more than 160 national cemeteries, soldiers' lots, and monument sites are under the jurisdiction of the VA-managed National Cemetery Administration. The National Park Service administers 14 national cemeteries, while Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia is currently under the authority of the commander, U.S. Army Military District of Washington.

## NATIONAL CEMETERY ADMINISTRATION

The interment of an eligible person is authorized in any national cemetery in which space is available. A particular space cannot be reserved in advance; spaces are assigned only at the time burial arrangements are completed.

For eligibility requirements and other information, visit [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov), or call **(202) 632-8035**.

To schedule a burial in any of the VA national cemeteries, call the National Cemetery Administration scheduling office at **(800) 535-1117**.

### COVID-19 UPDATES

For the latest information on operational changes due to COVID-19, visit [www.cem.va.gov/alerts.asp](http://www.cem.va.gov/alerts.asp).



# A LAST SALUTE: HONORS AND MEMORIALS

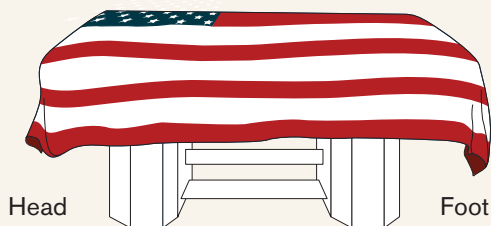


All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honor, duty....

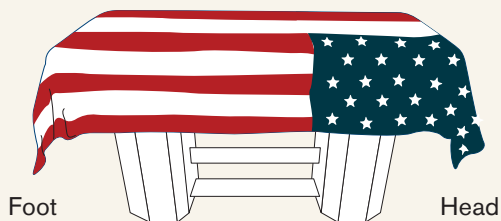
– Winston Churchill

Throughout history, across cultures, and around the globe, those who serve to defend their country have always been accorded an extra measure of respect upon their passing. The rituals and traditions of the military funeral lend dignity to the occasion and help comfort family and friends.

## DISPLAYING THE FLAG ON A CASKET



Front View



Back View

To properly display an American flag on a casket, center the flag on the casket so the blue field is at the head and over the left shoulder of the deceased.

## MILITARY FUNERALS

All eligible veterans, including military retirees, are entitled to military funeral honors. At least two uniformed military personnel—one of them from the deceased’s branch of service—will perform the ceremony, consisting at a minimum of the folding and presentation of the American flag and the playing of “Taps.”

Funeral honors are not provided automatically; they must be requested, usually by next of kin. The VA will furnish an American flag to drape over the casket. The following honors are available as indicated, subject to the wishes of the family:

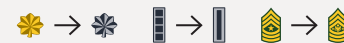
» **Officers through O3, warrant officers through CW3, and enlisted members through E8:**

The appropriate branch of service will provide military funeral honors, to include pallbearers, a firing party, and a bugler; a military chaplain may be scheduled, or the next of kin or funeral director may provide a family minister; cemetery staff can schedule the caisson, military band, and escort troops when requested



» **Officers O4–O5, warrant officers W4–W5, and enlisted members E9:**

The appropriate branch of service will provide pallbearers, a firing party, a bugler, a military band, and an escort (the size of which varies according to rank)



» **Army and Marine Corps colonels and higher ranks:** The riderless (caparisoned) horse may be used



» **Flag officers (Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps):** Minute guns are provided



» **Flag officers (Army, Navy, Coast Guard, and Marine Corps):** A gun salute is provided



» **Aviation personnel:** Each military service has specific rules and regulations regarding flyovers at military funerals that should be addressed/requested when scheduling the service

» **Dependents with no military service:** The appropriate branch of service will provide the casket team (body bearers/pallbearers); a military chaplain may be scheduled, or the next of kin or funeral director may provide a family minister

## HEADSTONES, MARKERS, MEDALLIONS

The VA furnishes a government headstone or grave marker with inscriptions, at no cost to the applicant, for the unmarked grave of any deceased eligible veteran in any cemetery in the world, regardless of the veteran's date of death. Eligible veterans may receive a government-furnished headstone or marker, or a medallion, but not both.

## PRESIDENTIAL MEMORIAL CERTIFICATES

Eligible recipients, including the next of kin and loved ones of honorably discharged deceased veterans, may request an engraved paper certificate signed by the current president to honor the memory of the deceased. Learn more at [va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/presidential-memorial-certificates](https://va.gov/burials-memorials/memorial-items/presidential-memorial-certificates), or by calling (202) 632-8035.



## PRACTICAL MATTERS: REIMBURSEMENT



**Thank you, for the cost you paid for our freedom ... to live in safety and pursue happiness....**

**– Sara Niles (American author)**

The VA offers reimbursement for a veteran's burial or funeral expenses for those who have not been reimbursed by other sources, as long as the veteran was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. **At least one of the following conditions must also be met:**

- » The veteran was receiving a VA pension or compensation at the time of death
- » The veteran was entitled to receive a VA pension or compensation but decided not to reduce his or her military retirement or disability pay
- » The veteran died in a VA hospital, in a nursing home under a VA contract, or in an approved state nursing home

**The amount of reimbursement varies by date of death and whether or not the death was service-related.**



SERVICE-RELATED	AMOUNT
On or after 9/11/2001	Up to \$2,000
Before 9/11/2001	Up to \$1,500

These allowances are revised periodically through legislation. For current amounts, contact your nearest VA regional office at **(800) 827-1000**, or consult the VA website at [va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance](https://va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance).

NON-SERVICE-RELATED	AMOUNT
On or after 10/1/2017	\$300 for burial + \$762 for plot
On or after 10/1/2016	\$300 for burial + \$749 for plot
On or after 10/1/2015	\$300 for burial + \$747 for plot
On or after 10/1/2014	\$300 for burial + \$745 for plot
On or after 10/1/2013	\$300 for burial + \$734 for plot

IF VA HOSPITALIZED AT TIME OF NON-SERVICE-RELATED DEATH	AMOUNT
On or after 10/1/2017	\$762 for burial + \$762 for plot
On or after 10/1/2016	\$749 for burial + \$749 for plot
On or after 10/1/2015	\$747 for burial + \$747 for plot
On or after 10/1/2014	\$745 for burial + \$745 for plot
On or after 10/1/2013	\$734 for burial + \$734 for plot



## TRANSPORTATION ALLOWANCES

In addition to reimbursing burial and funeral expenses, the VA may authorize the cost of transporting the remains of a veteran who at the time of death was hospitalized in a VA facility or domiciled at VA expense, or for transporting the remains of a service-connected disabled veteran from the place of death to the national cemetery nearest the veteran's last residence in which space is available. Certain other transportation situations may be covered; consult the VA website at [va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance](https://va.gov/burials-memorials/veterans-burial-allowance).

## SOCIAL SECURITY PAYOUT

The Social Security Administration may authorize a lump-sum payment up to \$255 if eligible individuals meet certain requirements. Survivors must apply for this payment within two years of the date of death. Learn more at [ssa.gov/forms/ssa-8.html](https://ssa.gov/forms/ssa-8.html), or by calling **(800) 772-1213**.



# HALLOWED GROUND: BURIAL PLACES AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA



To us, the ashes of our ancestors are sacred, and their resting place is hallowed ground.

– Chief Seattle

A space cannot be reserved at America's national cemeteries; one is assigned at the time of death. Because space is limited, so is eligibility. Most of the categories of eligibility shown here come with certain exceptions and conditions. For detailed information, consult [va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility](https://va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility).



## COVID-19 UPDATES

For the latest information on operational changes due to COVID-19, visit [arlingtoncemetery.mil/COVID-19](https://arlingtoncemetery.mil/COVID-19).

## ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

Eligibility criteria for in-ground burial at Arlington National Cemetery are the most stringent of all U.S. national cemeteries; an honorable discharge is required.

### ELIGIBILITY

Servicemembers with honorable discharge eligible for in-ground burial or inurnment in columbarium:

- » Died on active duty (other than for training)
- » Retired from active duty and receiving retirement pay
- » Recipient of Medal of Honor, Distinguished Service Cross (Air Force or Navy), Distinguished Service Medal, Silver Star, or Purple Heart
- » Former prisoner of war who served honorably in the active military, whose last period of service terminated honorably, and who died on or after November 30, 1993

Servicemembers with honorable discharge eligible for inurnment in columbarium but not for in-ground burial:

- » Died on active duty for training only
- » Veteran with at least one day of active duty other than for training
- » Member of Reserves or National Guard whose death occurs under honorable conditions while on active duty for training or performing full-time service

For complete current eligibility rules, visit [arlingtoncemetery.mil/funeralinformation/establishservices.aspx](https://arlingtoncemetery.mil/funeralinformation/establishservices.aspx).

### PROCEDURES

The surviving spouse or parent of the deceased should go to the local funeral home to make arrangements for any desired local funeral services. A funeral director should then call Arlington National Cemetery to make burial arrangements with the Consolidated Customer Service Center: **(877) 907-8585**.

When a death occurs outside the Washington, DC, area, the remains must be shipped to a DC-area funeral director, not to Arlington National Cemetery.

### HONORS

Eligible servicemembers may be interred or inurned with military honors; the Arlington National Cemetery superintendent will help make arrangements. The deceased's branch of service provides the appropriate military honors, and certain honors are reserved for those of higher ranks. Medal of Honor recipients and prisoners of war, however, are entitled to burial with full military honors, regardless of rank.

## OTHER NATIONAL CEMETERIES

Eligibility requirements for burial in a national cemetery are complex and subject to change. Learn more at [va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility](https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility).

### ELIGIBILITY

- » Any member of the armed forces who dies on active duty
- » Any veteran who was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable
- » U.S. Merchant Mariners with oceangoing service from Dec. 7, 1941, to Dec. 31, 1946
- » Certain officers of the U.S. Public Health Service with wartime service
- » Philippine veterans who meet certain eligibility criteria
- » Commissioned officers of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who meet certain requirements
- » National Guard members and reservists and members of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)
- » Spouses, dependents, and parents under certain conditions

## COLUMBARIUM

In general, the same eligibility requirements and procedures that apply to interment in the national cemeteries also apply to inurnment. Find complete current information at [va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility](https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility).

## STATE CEMETERIES

Many states complement the VA network of national cemeteries by maintaining state cemeteries in areas not served by one of those national cemeteries. As a rule, the same eligibility criteria apply as for the national cemeteries, but states may add residency or other requirements.

In most cases, there is no charge for the burial of a veteran in a federally funded state veterans' cemetery, but there might be a small charge for the interment of a qualifying family member. Learn more at [www.cem.va.gov/grants/veterans\\_cemeteries.asp](https://www.cem.va.gov/grants/veterans_cemeteries.asp).

## BASE CEMETERIES

Base cemeteries are under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Army, and eligibility requirements and procedures for burial are more restrictive than those of national cemeteries. For information, contact:

U.S. Army Human Resources Command  
(AHRC-PED-F)  
200 Stovall St.  
Alexandria, VA 22332

## OVERSEAS CEMETERIES

The American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) administers and maintains cemeteries and monuments honoring U.S. war dead who are buried overseas. This mission comprises 25 overseas military cemeteries; Tablets of the Missing that memorialize more than 94,000 U.S. servicemembers; and 26 memorials, monuments, and markers. For more information, contact the ABMC at **(703) 696-6900** or [info@abmc.gov](mailto:info@abmc.gov), or visit [abmc.gov](https://www.abmc.gov).



## BURIAL AT SEA

Burial at sea is available for active-duty servicemembers, retirees and veterans who were honorably discharged, U.S. civilian marine personnel of the Military Sealift Command, and certain family members. To request a burial at sea, call the U.S. Navy Mortuary Affairs Office at **(866) 787-0081** and ask for an information packet. You may also apply to the VA for a memorial headstone or marker that may be placed in a VA national cemetery at no charge. Learn more at [www.navy.mil/navydata/questions/burial.html](https://www.navy.mil/navydata/questions/burial.html).



# HELPFUL RESOURCES

## DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

The most current official information from the VA:  
**(202) 632-8035**  
[va.gov/burials-memorials](http://va.gov/burials-memorials)

To schedule a military funeral:  
**(800) 535-1117**

To coordinate ceremonies, funeral directors may call:  
**(877) MIL-HONR (645-4667)**

To apply for a headstone or grave marker:  
[va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/va40-1330.pdf](http://va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/va40-1330.pdf)

## ANATOMICAL GIFTS

Servicemembers who choose to leave their bodies to military medical science upon their deaths should request information from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences:  
**(301) 295-3301**  
[usuhs.edu](http://usuhs.edu)

## DEATHS ABROAD

The Bureau of Consular Affairs of the U.S. Department of State is responsible for the welfare and whereabouts of U.S. citizens traveling and residing abroad, which includes providing assistance to the families of those citizens who die abroad. Learn more at [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov).

Overseas Citizens Services 24-hour hotlines  
U.S. and Canada: **(888) 407-4747**  
Overseas: **+1 (202) 501-4444**

## NATIONWIDE GRAVESITE LOCATOR

To search for a person's burial location, start at [gravelocator.cem.va.gov](http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov). You may also contact state cemeteries directly; find the list and contact information at [www.cem.va.gov/grants/veterans\\_cemeteries.asp](http://www.cem.va.gov/grants/veterans_cemeteries.asp).



Military Officers Association of America  
201 N. Washington St.  
Alexandria, VA 22314-2539

(800) 234-MOAA (6622)  
Email: [beninfo@moaa.org](mailto:beninfo@moaa.org)  
Website: [www.moaa.org](http://www.moaa.org)



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