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Burial Flags

The VA provides roughly 484,000 American burial flags annually. Only one is provided per veteran. Most veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and many Reservists are eligible for a free flag. Eligibility may be confirmed by calling your nearest VA office.

When burial is in a national, state or post cemetery a burial flag will be provided automatically. For burial in a private cemetery, you must obtain the flag at your nearest VA office by filling out VA form 21-2008, and submitting it with the veteran's discharge papers. The VA will not provide flag holders for private burials.

Headstones and Markers

VA form (40-1330) must be submitted by the next of kin, the funeral director or cemetery rep, along with copies of the veteran's discharge papers. This form will ask about type of stone or marker, inscriptions and authorized religious emblems. As with the flag, info may be obtained by calling your local VA office at 1-800-827-1000.

Reimbursement of Burial Expenses

The VA will pay a \$300 allowance for veterans who, at the time of death, were entitled to receive pension or compensation or would have been entitled to compensation but for receipt of military retirement pay. Eligibility also may be established when death occurs in a VA facility, a nursing home under VA contact or a state nursing home.

An allowance of \$150 will be paid by the VA when a veteran is not buried in a cemetery that is under U.S. government jurisdiction under the following circumstances: the veteran was discharged from active duty because of disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty; the veteran was in receipt of compensation or pension or would have been except for receiving military retired pay; or the veteran died in a VA facility. The \$150 plot allowance may be paid to the state if a veteran is buried without charge for the cost of a plot or interment in a state-owned cemetery reserved solely for veterans. Burial expenses paid by the deceased's employer or a state agency will not be reimbursed.

Again, it's best to call your local VA office. You will need to apply by filing VA form 21-530.

Military Funeral Honors

The Dept. of Defense is responsible for providing military funeral honors. The VA staff assists with such honors at national cemeteries. Upon request by the family, all eligible vets are entitled to receive an honors ceremony that includes folding and presenting

of the flag and the playing of Taps. Burial details consist of two or more uniformed military persons with at least one member of the veteran's parent service. The DOD program calls for funeral home directors to request military funeral honors on behalf of the veteran's family.

Veteran organizations may assist in the provision of military funeral honors. Check with your local VFW branch. At a national cemetery, honors are arranged prior to the committal service by the funeral home. Questions concerning this DOD program may be sent to this address: Military Funeral Honors, 9504 IH-35 North, Suite 320, San Antonio, TX 78233-6635. Or call your local VA office for clarification.

State Cemetery Grants Program

This program assists states in providing gravesites for veterans in those areas where VA's national cemeteries cannot fully satisfy their burial needs. The VA has awarded over \$87 million to establish, expand or improve 49 veterans cemeteries in 26 states plus Guam and Saipan. Check with your local VA office for a list of these cemeteries and for more information.

Military Service Records

To receive a free copy of your military service records, you must fill out Standard Form 180 and mail it to the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, Missouri. This form can be obtained from your local VA office or on-line at www.va.gov/

Obtaining Replacement Medals

For those veterans who have lost their medals or were never issued certain medals, they are available from the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis. To request replacement medals, you must again fill out the Standard Form 180. Fill in as much info as possible and send the form along with a copy of your discharge papers stating the awarded medals in order to receive replacements.

Another option is to write to: Bureau of Naval Personnel, Liaison Office, Room 5409, 9700 Page Ave., St. Louis, MO 63132-5100.

I hope that this short summary has helped outline some of the burial benefits you may be entitled to. Again I must emphasize that this is not complete or official by any means--laws change. Do check with your local VA office for the complete rundown or check out the website listed above.

For those of you planning to attend our next LCT Reunion (in New Orleans), I will try to bring along some copies of all the forms listed in this article.

Ron Swanson, ed.