

# National Cemetery Administration

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, Texas

**The National Cemetery Administration honors veterans with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service to our Nation.**

On July 17, 1862, Congress enacted legislation that authorized President Lincoln to purchase “cemetery grounds” to be used as national cemeteries “for soldiers who shall have died in the service of the country.” Fourteen cemeteries were established that first year.

By 1870, the remains of nearly 300,000 Union dead had been buried in 73 national cemeteries. Most of the cemeteries were located in the southeast, near the battlefields and campgrounds of the Civil War.

The National Cemetery Administration has evolved slowly since the initial period of great challenge related to the Civil War. All honorably discharged veterans became eligible for burial in 1873.



Fort Logan National Cemetery, Colorado

In the 1930s, new national cemeteries were established to serve veterans living in major metropolitan areas such as New York, Baltimore, Minneapolis, San Diego, San Francisco and San Antonio.

In 1973, Congress transferred 82 national cemeteries from the Department of the Army to the Veterans Administration, now the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). These were added to the 21 VA cemeteries at hospitals and nursing homes to comprise 103 cemeteries in what was then the National Cemetery System.

On November 11, 1998, the Veterans Programs Enhancement Act was signed, changing the name of the National Cemetery System to the National Cemetery Administration.



Tahoma National Cemetery, Washington

Today, there are a total of 141 national cemeteries. The National Cemetery Administration is responsible for 125 of them, while the National Park Service maintains 14 and the Department of the Army maintains two cemeteries – including Arlington National Cemetery.

In the midst of the largest cemetery expansion since the Civil War, VA operates 125 national cemeteries in 39 states and Puerto Rico. VA’s newest national cemetery, South Florida VA National Cemetery, opened in April 2007.

Additional cemeteries will open in Sarasota and Jacksonville, Fla.; Bakersfield, Calif.; Columbia, S.C.; Birmingham, Ala., and Philadelphia, Pa. More than three million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict – from the Revolutionary War to the Global War on Terror – are buried in VA’s national cemeteries.



Chattanooga National Cemetery, Tennessee

Visit us on the web at: [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov)

## Burial Eligibility

Burial in a national cemetery is open to all members of the armed forces and veterans who have met minimum active service duty requirements and been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. Their spouse, minor children, and, under certain conditions, dependent unmarried adult children, are also eligible for burial, even if they predecease the veteran. Members of the reserve components of the armed forces who die while on active duty or while performing training duty, or who have 20 years of service creditable for retired pay, may also be eligible for burial.

## Benefits

Burial benefits include a gravesite in any of our national cemeteries with available space, the opening and closing of the grave, a government headstone or marker, perpetual care of the grave, a burial flag, and Presidential Memorial Certificates at no cost to the family. VA's Veterans Benefits Administration pays a burial and plot allowance for those veterans eligible by law. For information, please contact the nearest VA Regional Office at (800) 827-1000.

## Arranging Burial

The next of kin, or the family's funeral director of choice, may make arrangements directly with a national cemetery. Before burial can take place, cemetery staff must verify the veteran's eligibility. To enable the staff to do this, the next of kin or funeral director must provide the cemetery staff with a copy of the veteran's properly signed discharge papers, or the veteran's service, social security or VA claim numbers to use for verification of service and character of discharge.

## Headstone and Marker Program

**VA provides headstones and markers:**

- For the graves of eligible veterans in private and government cemeteries around the world
- For eligible dependents of veterans buried in national, post or state veterans cemeteries
- For niches to mark columbaria used for the inurnment of cremated remains
- In a variety of styles: flat bronze, flat granite, flat marble, upright marble, upright granite and marble, granite and bronze niche covers
- Inscribed with the name, the dates of birth and death and branch of service of the deceased
- With an authorized emblem of belief
- With other approved optional text inscribed at government expense if space allows

## Burial Flag Program

- VA provides a U.S. flag to drape the casket of members of the armed forces and eligible veterans
- The flag is given to the next of kin and they may donate the flag to the cemetery's Avenue of Flags

## Nationwide Gravesite Locator

The burial locations of veterans and their family members in VA National Cemeteries, state veterans cemeteries, various other military and Department of Interior cemeteries may now be accessed through the Nationwide Gravesite Locator. Gravesites in private cemeteries marked with a government furnished headstone or marker since 1997 may also be located. <http://gravelocator.cem.va.gov>

## Presidential Memorial Certificate

- A Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) is inscribed with the veteran's name and bears the President's signature to honor the memory of honorably discharged, deceased veterans
- Recipients include next of kin and loved ones
- Please send your written PMC request to:  
Presidential Memorial Certificates  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
5109 Russell Road  
Quantico, VA 22143-3909
- FAX requests to: (800) 455-7143  
<http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/pmc.asp>

## State Cemetery Grants Program

VA provides assistance through the State Cemetery Grants Program for up to 100 percent of the funds needed to build, expand or improve veterans cemeteries owned and operated by the states. The program enables states to provide gravesites for veterans in areas where national cemeteries cannot fully satisfy veterans' burial needs.

## Military Funeral Honors

The Department of Defense (DOD) is responsible for providing military funeral honors. The DOD program, "Honoring Those Who Served," calls for funeral directors to request military funeral honors on behalf of the veterans' families. Veterans organizations may assist in the provision of military funeral honors. In support of this program, VA national cemetery staff may assist in coordinating military funeral honors.

## Additional Information

**Department of Veterans Affairs  
National Cemetery Administration (41C2)  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420**

**You may visit the NCA Web Site at [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov) or telephone (800) 827-1000 from any location in the United States for additional information on burial eligibility or other VA benefits.**