

The background of the entire page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the American flag, showing the red and white stripes and the blue field with white stars.

Honoring Their Service

A Family's Guide

to Veteran

Funerals

This guide simplifies veteran funeral planning, helping you secure military honors and benefits with clarity and dignity.

Eligibility for Honors

Types of Honors

National Cemetery Burial

Headstones & Markers

Military Memorial Planning

Intro

Losing a veteran is deeply felt, but planning their military honors can be a powerful way to honor their service and bring comfort to those who loved them.



This guide helps military families navigate veteran funeral honors, benefits, and burial options with clarity and dignity during a difficult time.

The background of the page features a close-up of the American flag, with the stars and stripes visible. In the bottom left corner, there are red carnations. The text is overlaid on this background.

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Eligibility for Honors

Understanding Military Funeral Honors

Losing a veteran brings unique opportunities to honor their service. Military funeral honors provide dignified recognition of their sacrifice, but navigating eligibility requirements can feel overwhelming. This section clarifies who qualifies for these honors and how to secure them. With this knowledge, you can ensure your loved one receives the tribute they earned.

Key Eligibility Requirements

- **Service Commitment:** Veterans must have served on active duty for at least 24 continuous months. Those who died during active duty or from service-connected disabilities may qualify regardless of time served.
- **Discharge Status:** An honorable or general discharge is typically required. Those with other discharge types may need to submit additional documentation for review.
- **Documentation Needed:** A DD Form 214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge) is essential. If lost, request a replacement through the National Archives before making arrangements.
- **Special Cases:** Reservists and National Guard members may qualify if they met active-duty requirements. Peacetime-only veterans should consult the VA for exceptions.

Final Considerations

Remember that eligibility doesn't guarantee automatic honors—you or your funeral director must request them. Start the process early, as some elements (like honor guard availability) require scheduling. The VA website offers a detailed eligibility checklist, and your local Veterans Service Organization can provide personalized help. Most importantly, these honors exist to reflect your veteran's legacy; let that guide you through the paperwork.

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Types of Honors

Standard Military Honors: By federal law, every eligible veteran is entitled to a professionally folded U.S. burial flag and a live or recorded performance of Taps. These core elements are arranged through the VA at no cost to families, though some funeral homes help coordinate the logistics.

Rifle Volley: Often misunderstood as a "21-gun salute" (reserved for presidents), this traditional three-volley salute involves seven riflemen firing three synchronized blanks. The solemn ritual dates back to battlefield ceasefires, symbolizing the fallen warrior's safe passage.

Honor Guard: A minimum of two uniformed service members (often from the veteran's branch) meticulously fold and present the flag to next of kin. Families can request additional personnel for larger ceremonies, though availability depends on local military unit schedules.

Bugler or Electronic Taps: Due to a shortage of military buglers, the VA provides a stereo system for Taps, but families can request a live bugler through nonprofits like Bugles Across America. These volunteers—many being veterans themselves—consider it a sacred duty to perform live.

Branch-Specific Traditions: The Army's Old Guard offers horse-drawn caissons at Arlington, while the Navy may include a "ringing of the bell" ceremony for sailors. Ask your funeral director about options—some bases provide flyovers or ship decking for retired personnel.



Honor Options Explained

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Burial in National

Cemeteries

National cemeteries offer a dignified, cost-free burial for eligible veterans and their families. These **hallowed grounds** provide perpetual care and a community of fellow service members. Understanding the options and requirements ensures your loved one's interment **reflects their sacrifice**. We'll guide you through **eligibility, locations, and how to arrange this lasting tribute**.

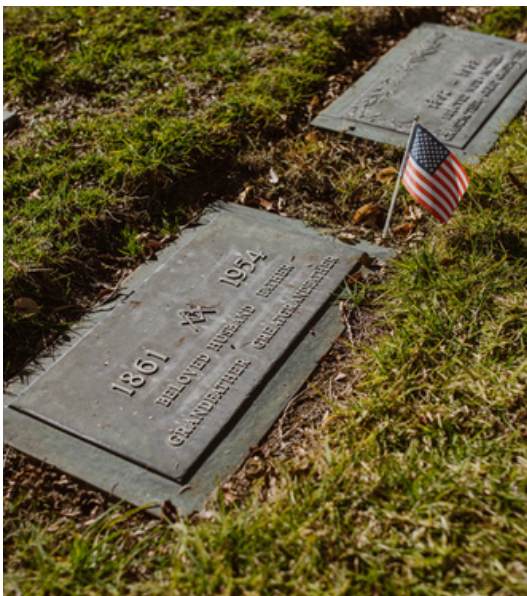
- **Eligibility Requirements:** Veterans with any discharge status other than dishonorable qualify, including Reservists with 20+ years. Spouses and dependent children may also be eligible for burial alongside the veteran.
- **Choosing a Location:** The VA operates 155 national cemeteries, with some offering scenic views or historic significance. Families can use the VA's online cemetery locator to compare proximity and special features.
- **Scheduling the Interment:** Contact the National Cemetery Scheduling Office as soon as possible after the veteran's passing. Weekday burials are most common, but some locations offer limited weekend services.
- **What to Expect Day-Of:** Military honors will be conducted at the gravesite unless previously arranged elsewhere. The cemetery staff handles all logistics, allowing families to focus on remembrance.



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Headstones & Markers

- **Types of Markers Available:** Flat bronze, flat granite, and upright marble/stone markers are available for veterans. Each style meets strict size and design guidelines set by the VA.
- **Eligibility Requirements:** Any veteran with a discharge status other than dishonorable qualifies for a free government marker. Spouses and dependents buried in private cemeteries may also be eligible.
- **Customizable Options:** Families can include religious symbols, military emblems, or a short personalized inscription. All designs must be pre-approved by the VA to ensure compliance.
- **Application Process:** Submit VA Form 40-1330 online, by mail, or through your funeral home. Processing typically takes 4-6 weeks, so plan ahead if possible.
- **Placement Guidelines:** Government markers must be installed by cemetery staff in national cemeteries. For private cemeteries, families are responsible for placement but must follow VA specifications.



Tip

When composing an inscription, focus on their service and legacy —avoid lengthy epitaphs to ensure readability.

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Military Memorial Planning



Custom Military Memorials

A military memorial service **blends tradition with personal touches** to honor your veteran's unique life and service. Whether held at a chapel, veterans' hall, or outdoors, these services can incorporate **both formal honors and heartfelt tributes**. Thoughtful planning ensures **their legacy shines** through every detail. Below are key elements to consider when designing a meaningful farewell.

- **Incorporating Military Honors:** Coordinate with your funeral director to schedule flag folding, Taps, or a rifle volley during the service. Consider placing their uniform, medals, or a shadow box on display to personalize the tribute.
- **Program Structure:** Open with a moment of silence or the Pledge of Allegiance to set a reverent tone. Alternate between military traditions (like a missing-man table) and personal stories to balance solemnity and celebration.
- **Music & Readings:** Include the national anthem, branch hymns, or other patriotic selections alongside their favorite songs. Invite a fellow veteran to recite poems like "In Flanders Fields" or share brief remarks.
- **Virtual Participation:** Livestream the service for distant loved ones using platforms like the VA's Memorial Video Service. Provide digital programs with photos and service history to enhance remote participation.

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Navigating Benefits & Paperwork



Maximizing Funeral Benefits

Planning a veteran's funeral involves **critical paperwork**, but understanding the process eases the burden. The VA provides **burial allowances** (up to \$2,000 for service-related deaths) and **plot-interment reimbursements** for private cemeteries. Key forms like the VA Form 21P-530 (Application for Burial Benefits) must be filed within **two years** of burial. Your funeral director or local Veterans Service Officer can help **streamline submissions** and avoid delays.

Grieving families often overlook **hidden benefits**, like free memorial certificates or **Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)** for surviving spouses. Organize documents early: the DD-214, marriage certificate (for spouses), and **death certificate** are essential. The VA's **online portal** simplifies tracking claims, but phone support remains available for those less tech-savvy. Remember, these benefits exist to **honor their service**—persistence through paperwork is part of that tribute.

Inquire about any available grief support resources or aftercare services.

Don't hesitate to ask any questions you may have throughout the process.

Tip

You're not alone—local VFW posts and VA reps exist solely to help families like yours navigate this process with care.



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