U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

National Cemetery Administration

Unclaimed Veteran Remains

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) works with Veteran service groups, funeral industry partners, public administrators and other concerned citizens to ensure the dignified burial of unclaimed Veterans. "Unclaimed Veterans" are defined as those who die with no next of kin to claim their remains and insufficient funds to cover burial expenses. A VA pension or other compensation is no longer a pre-requisite for these "Unclaimed Veterans" to receive burial benefits. Below is a step-by-step process for determining eligibility and arranging burial for unclaimed Veterans.

Step 1: **Determine Eligibility:**

- Contact the **National Cemetery Scheduling Office** at **1-800-535-1117** to determine if an identified, unclaimed decedent is a Veteran and eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery. The process may require 48 hours or more.

OR

- State or tribal Veterans cemeteries also offer burial options for eligible Veterans. Contact the state or tribal Veterans cemetery for eligibility determination and scheduling the burial. A listing is available at www.cem.va.gov/cem/cems/listcem.asp.

Step 2: **Arrange for the deceased, unclaimed Veteran's burial in either:**

- A National Cemetery - Contact the **National Cemetery Scheduling Office** at **1-800-535-1117** to arrange burial for eligible Veterans in any of VA's 131 national cemeteries with available space.
- A State or Tribal Veterans Cemetery - Contact the state or tribal Veterans cemetery to schedule the burial. A listing is available at www.cem.va.gov/cem/cems/listcem.asp.
- A Private Cemetery - Veterans buried in a private cemetery may be entitled to a headstone or marker. To apply, complete **VA Form 40-1330**, **Claim for Standard Government Headstone or Marker**. NOTE: The cost of setting the headstone or marker is the responsibility of the requestor.

Step 3: **Apply for monetary burial benefits associated with the burial of the unclaimed Veteran.** Eligibility may depend on the Veteran's place of burial.

Monetary Burial Benefits Available for Unclaimed Veterans by Place of Burial
National Cemetery • Reimbursement for the cost of a Casket or Urn (VA National Cemetery Only) • Reimbursement for transportation to a National Cemetery • Burial Allowance
VA-Funded State or Tribal Veterans' Cemetery • Burial Allowance
Private Cemetery • Burial Allowance • Plot Allowance

Monetary Burial Benefit Descriptions:

Casket or Urn: An individual or entity that pays for the casket or urn used to inter an unclaimed Veteran, in a VA national cemetery, who died on or after January 10, 2014, may apply for reimbursement of the cost through the National Cemetery Administration. The casket or urn must meet certain standards and must be used for burial or inurnment of the unclaimed Veteran in a national cemetery. Reimbursement is for actual cost, not to exceed an annually established average, published each year in the Federal Register. VA will process claims retroactively to the effective date of the benefit, January 10, 2014. Review the Unclaimed Veteran Remains – Casket or Urn Reimbursement Program Fact Sheet for instructions on how to apply.

Transportation to a National Cemetery: Any individual or entity that pays for the transportation of an unclaimed Veteran's remains to a national cemetery for burial may apply for reimbursement of the costs through the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), **VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Benefits**. VBA must receive a receipt, preferably on letterhead, showing who paid the costs, the name of the deceased Veteran, the specific transportation expenses incurred, and the dates of the services rendered. Reimbursement will not exceed the cost of transporting the unclaimed Veteran's remains to the national cemetery closest to the Veteran's last place of residence in which burial space is available.

Burial Allowance: Any individual or entity that pays for the costs associated with preparing the remains of an unclaimed Veteran for burial or inurnment may be eligible for a burial allowance. Submit burial allowance requests through VBA, using **VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Benefits**. VBA currently reimburses these costs at a flat rate of $300. For more information read VBA's Burial and Plot-Interment Allowances Fact Sheet.

Plot Allowances: Any individual or entity that pays for a plot for the burial of an unclaimed Veteran in a private cemetery may be eligible for a plot allowance. Submit plot allowance requests through VBA, using **VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Benefits**. VBA currently reimburses these costs at a flat rate of $745. For more information read VBA's Burial and Plot-Interment Allowances Fact Sheet.

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*Veterans eligible for burial in a VA national, state or tribal Veterans' cemetery may receive a headstone or marker, a U.S. Burial Flag and a Presidential Memorial Certificate.

**Applicants should annotate "unclaimed remains" to define relationship to the Veteran when completing VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Benefits. Use one VA Form 21P-530, Application for Burial Benefits, to apply for the Transportation Reimbursement, Burial Allowance and Plot Allowance. There will be a separate form for the casket or urn reimbursement when the final rule is published.

***If a Veteran dies while at a VA facility under authorized VA admission, and the remains are unclaimed, the facility director will ensure proper burial for the Veteran as defined by VHA Handbook 1601B.04, Decedent Affairs, Section 8, "Unclaimed Remains." If a Veteran dies at a non-VA facility under authorized admission at VA's expense, and is unclaimed, contact the closest VA healthcare facility to arrange for proper burial of the unclaimed Veteran. A listing is available here.