

Polish Legion of American Veterans, U.S.A.



Internal Operations

Section 12

Military Funeral Honors

OBJECTIVES

It is the Objective of the Polish Legion of American Veterans, U.S.A.

- To keep the membership informed of the latest benefits for all veterans.

Military Funeral Honors

- Honoring Those Who Served S12-2
- Background S12-2
- Public Law 105-261 S12-2
- Funeral Directors Kit S12-3
- Tool Free Telephone Numbers S12-3
- Military Funeral Honors Web Site S12-4
- “Tap” Compact Disc. S12-4
- Veteran Service Organization Participation S12-4
- Funeral Directors S12-4
- American Burial Flag S12-5
- Reimbursement of Burial Expenses S12-5
- Presidential Memorial Certificate S12-6

Military Funeral Honors

Public Law 105-261

“It is our national obligation to demonstrate the country’s gratitude to those who, in times of war and peace, have faithfully defended our country. The rendering of Military Funeral Honors for our nation’s veterans is our final tribute to those who have made personal sacrifices in defense of our nation.” (Office of Secretary of Defense)

Honoring Those Who Served

Honoring those who served is a Department of Defense program for providing dignified Military Funeral Honors to veterans who have defended our Nation. While Military Funeral Honors is a long standing tradition within the Armed Forces, this program is in response to a new law governing funeral honors for eligible veterans. Department of Defense has implemented changes to comply with the new law and has launched a series of efforts to enhance and improve the quality of Military Funeral Honors for veterans.

Background

Beginning in 1998, the Department of Defense worked closely with the Veterans Service Organizations and Funeral Directors Associations to determine how best to deliver Military Funeral Honors to all eligible veterans whose families request them. This has been and will continue to be a challenging task given the significant military manpower and demographic changes that have occurred over the past decade. The end of the Cold War led to significant military force reductions. As of 1999, the active duty force level has dropped 33% -- from 2.1 million members to 1.4 million. The Nation also reduced the size of the Reserve force, from 1.2 million members to 900,000 – a 25% decrease. Today, Department of Defense deployments and commitments have created a higher operating tempo than before the end of the Cold War. As these force reductions were taking place, the number of veteran deaths was increasing dramatically. In 1989, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) counted 459,000 deaths. By the year 2008, the VA projects that number will increase to 620,000 annually, or an average 1,700 funerals a day. This situation has led the Department of Defense to work with Veterans Service Organizations and Funeral Directors Associations to address the issue of Military Funeral Honors.

Public Law 105-216

On October 5, 1999, President Clinton signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act, Public Law 105-216. Section 578 of the Act reflects the extensive deliberations conducted on Military Funeral Honors over the past year. The law now includes the following:

- A basic Military Funeral Honors ceremony consisting of the folding and presentation of the flag and the playing of Taps for every eligible veteran upon request.

- A funeral honors detail to perform this ceremony shall consist of two or more uniformed members of the Armed Forces, with at least one member from the Service in which the deceased veteran served
- Authority to reimburse members of Veterans Service Organizations and other authorized organizations for expenses when they participate with the military in the delivery of Military Funeral Honors. These individuals are covered for the purposes of liability and workers compensation.
- Pays Reserve components members an allowance of \$50/day and provides retirement points, which are allowed to accrue above the annual 75 point cap, for performing honors details. Covers Reserve components members for liability and authorizes reimbursement for their travel over 50 miles.

Funeral Directors Kit

The Funeral Directors Associations, working with the Department of Defense, recommended the development of a kit to assist Funeral Directors in obtaining information on how to obtain Military Funeral Honors. The Department has developed such a kit and is sending it to all licensed Funeral Directors and to Veterans Service Organization headquarters. The kit contains:

- A Military Service Directory-providing telephone numbers for every state and county to arrange for Military Funeral Honors.
- A Military Funeral Honors Brochure, which highlights the basic elements of the funeral honors ceremony, defines eligibility and contains other relevant information on Military Funeral Honors.
- A list of Frequently Asked Questions providing answers to questions families may ask Funeral Directors about Military Funeral Honors.
- Instructional brochures on how to fold the flag for families who just want a flag without the ceremonial folding and presentation.
- A Compact Disc of “Taps” for situations where the family only wants the playing of “Taps” at the burial without the funeral honors detail.

Toll Free Telephone Number

This effort focuses on making it easier to request Military Funeral Honors. *The Department of Defense has established a toll free line (1-877-MIL-HONR) for use by Funeral Directors to request honors.* By using this number, Funeral Directors can reach the regional military offices to arrange for Military Funeral Honors ceremonies. The toll free line will provide Funeral Directors with a single point of contact to obtain the necessary information rather than calling various places. This will reduce the time spent by Funeral Directors to obtain the information they need to honor families' requests for Military Funeral Honors. At the recommendation of members of Veterans Service Organizations, the Department has designed the toll free number for Funeral Directors only. Family members should work with their Funeral Directors if they desire Military Funeral Honors.

Military Funeral Honors Web Site

The final phase of the Department's improved outreach is the development of a web site. The Department of Defense web site, located at <http://www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil> will contain pertinent information for the public and Funeral Directors about Military Funeral Honors, including a systematic procedure on the process to request honors. The web site will have links to current legislation on Military Funeral Honors.

"Taps" Compact Disc.

Due to a limited number of buglers in the Military Services, a recorded version of "Taps" is often used. Based on comments that some recorded versions of "Taps" are poor quality the Department of Defense arranged to record the playing of "Taps" at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day 1999. This version of "Taps" will be recorded on a compact disc to ensure superior quality playback. There will be wide distribution of the "Taps" compact disc to include all military units, Funeral Directors and Veterans Service Organization headquarters from which their members may request copies.

Veterans Service Organization Participation

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000 allows reimbursement of expenses for members of Veterans Service Organizations and other organizations that train with and participate in the delivery of Military Funeral Honors with the military. For example, an organization might augment the ceremony by providing a firing party. This voluntary assistance would be in addition to the services provided by the Military Funeral Honors detail. If there are members of an organization in the area who may have an interest in assisting in the Military Funeral Honors ceremony, they or their organization should contact their local military units. At this time, a final decision on the development of a reimbursement policy for veterans' service organization participation is delayed through Fiscal Year 2000

Funeral Directors

The Funeral Directors are a key to the success of the Department's initiatives to improve the delivery of Military Funeral Honors for veterans. The Funeral Director's understanding of how to obtain the honors, use of the toll free phone system to obtain honors and awareness that only the Funeral Director should request honors, will significantly support the entire effort. The cooperation and support of the Nation's Funeral Directors in this process are essential for the successful delivery of Military Funeral Honors for those who have faithfully served their country.

American Burial Flag

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides approximately 484,000 American burial flags for deceased veterans annually.

Only one burial flag may be provided per veteran. Most veterans are eligible for a burial flag. Reservist entitled to retired pay is also eligible to receive a burial flag.

When burial is in a national, state or post cemetery a burial flag will be provided. When burial is in a private cemetery, burial flags may be obtained from VA regional offices, national cemeteries and most U.S. post offices by completing VA Form 2008, Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes, and submitting it with a copy of the veteran's discharge papers at any of these locations.

VA cannot provide flag holders for placement on private headstones or markers. These flag holders may be purchased from private manufacturing companies.

Government Headstone

If burial will be in a private cemetery and a Government headstone or marker will be requested for the veteran's grave, the family should complete VA Form 40-1330, Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker for Installation in a Private or State Veterans' Cemetery, in advance and place it with the veteran's military discharge papers for use at the time of need.

Only an eligible veteran may receive a Government-provided headstone or marker for placement in a private cemetery.

Veteran's spouses and dependent children are not eligible

Monetary Burial Allowances

In certain circumstances, a monetary burial allowance is available from the Veterans Benefits Administration. These benefits are not provided by the National Cemetery Administration. For assistance please call: 1-800-827-1000

Reimbursement of Burial Expenses

VA will pay a burial allowance up to \$1,500 if the veteran's death is service-connected. In some instances, VA also will pay the cost of transporting the remains of a service-disabled veteran to the national cemetery nearest the home of the deceased that has available gravesites. In such cases, the person who bore the veteran's burial expense may claim reimbursement from VA.

VA will pay a \$300 burial and funeral expense 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.

Additional costs of transportation of the remains may be paid. There is no time limit for filing reimbursement claims of service-connected deaths. In other deaths, claims must be filed within two years after permanent burial or cremation.

VA will pay a \$150 plot allowance 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 veteran burials. Burial expenses paid by the deceased's employer or a state agency will not be reimbursed. For information on monetary benefits, call 1-800-827-1000.

This information was obtained from the 1999 Federal Benefits for Veterans and Their Dependents Pamphlet

Presidential Memorial Certificate

A Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) is an engraved paper certificate, signed by the current President, to honor the memory of honorably discharged deceased veterans.

History

This program was initiated in March 1962 by President John F. Kennedy and has been continued by all subsequent Presidents. Statutory authority for the program is Section 112, Title 38, of the United States Code.

Administration

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) administers the PMC program by preparing the certificates which bear the President's signature expressing the country's grateful recognition of the veteran's service in the United States Armed Forces.

Eligibility

Eligible recipients include the deceased veteran's next of kin and loved ones. More than one certificate may be provided.

Application

Eligible recipients, or someone acting on their behalf, may apply for a PMC in person at any VA regional office or by U.S. mail only. Requests cannot be sent via email. There is no form to use when requesting a PMC. Please be sure to include a return mailing address with your request and a copy of the veteran's discharge documents.

Please send your PMC request to:

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
National Cemetery Administration (403A)
810 Vermont Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20420
