

Solano Veterans Scene for July 2012

Veterans Burial Benefits

We are very lucky in Solano County to be the home of a new veterans cemetery located near Dixon. The Sacramento Valley National Cemetery opened several years ago and it is now almost fully developed and a beautiful addition to our county. Their friendly, competent staff stand ready to help all veterans and their families during the stressful time of dealing with a loved one's death.

In addition, our Sacramento Valley National Cemetery always has a wonderful Memorial Day ceremony, Veterans Day observance and a Wreaths Across America ceremony every December where a live wreath is placed on every grave by patriotic volunteers.

Across the nation, the Veterans Administration maintains 133 national cemeteries in 39 states. In California, there are nine national cemeteries of which five are accepting new interments. The open cemeteries are the Riverside National Cemetery, San Joaquin Valley National Cemetery, Miramar National Cemetery, Bakersfield National Cemetery and our Sacramento Valley National Cemetery. The other national cemeteries are only accepting burials of family members of persons already interred. There is also a beautiful state veterans' cemetery in Igo, which is close to Redding. This cemetery is fairly new and is accepting all qualified veteran burial requests.

The Veterans Administration and the California Department of Veteran Affairs provide certain burial benefits for qualified veterans and their dependents. This benefit includes burial plot, grave marker, military honors, burial flag and some reimbursement for qualified veterans funeral and burial expenses.

People eligible for burial include veterans, service members who die on active duty, certain reservists and National Guard members who have been deployed on title federal orders and have a DD-214, World War II Merchant Mariners and certain others who have served in Allied Forces who supported our Armed Forces in a war. Eligibility is determined by the national cemetery staff. Sacramento Valley National Cemetery may be reached at (707) 693-2460 for questions on eligibility.

Certain spouses and children are eligible for burial too, depending on the circumstances. Spouses of veterans can be buried first at no charge if they pre-decease the veteran, and the married couple may be buried in the same grave on top of each other.

Burial benefits at a national cemetery include the plot, opening and closing, the vault if needed, grave marker and military honors if requested. There is no charge for any of the aforementioned services. Usually only the discharge or DD-214 and death certificate is necessary to make burial arrangements with the national cemetery.

Military honors are provided if the arrangements are made ahead of time. Usually your funeral home will take care of contacting the casualty branch of the service in which the veteran served.

Reimbursement for funeral arrangements, cremation, casket or services provided by a funeral may be paid if the veteran was in receipt of benefits from the Veterans Administration, usually either compensation for a service-connected disability or veteran pension. The Solano County Veteran Service Office can help in applying for this reimbursement by bringing in the death certificate, discharge and funeral bill payment receipts. This benefit is paid after the fact and the bills must be paid first.

The Veterans Administration will pay up to \$300 for funeral and burial expenses and \$700 for the plot allowance if the veteran is receiving monetary benefits from the VA at the time of death. If the veteran is buried in the national cemetery there is no reimbursement for the plot. This plot allowance only applies if the veteran is buried in a private cemetery. If the veteran dies of a service-connected condition, the VA will pay up to \$2,000 of the paid funeral bills to the person who paid the funeral expenses.

Veterans being buried in private cemeteries may order a veterans grave marker at no charge from the Veterans Administration. This process also can be accomplished through the Solano County Veteran

Service Office. There are several types available to order. There is usually a charge from the cemetery to place the marker.

The veteran's family may also order a presidential memorial certificate signed by the current president to honor the memory of the honorably discharged veteran. Our office can also order these for the family members.

Ted Puntillo is director of Veteran Services for Solano County. Reach him at 784-6590 or TEPuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.