

Solano Veterans Scene – February, 2016

By Ted Puntillo, Veterans Services Director, Solano County

Benefits to help families when a veteran passes away

What do you do when a veteran dies in Solano County? Who do you contact? What forms will you need? What benefits might you be eligible for to help bury your loved one? What about ongoing pension benefits for widows and children? Don't go this route alone, you have enough to do. Call the Solano County Veterans Service Office; we're here to help you in your time of need.

Make sure you have the essential paperwork

First of all, every veteran should have a copy of their discharge DD-214 on file with our office or in a safe place at home. This document is essential in order to receive benefits to help with burial, cremation and funeral arrangements, in addition to benefits for veteran's dependents. If you don't have a copy of this document already, come to my office and we'll help secure you a copy right away.

Benefits to help with cremation, burial and funeral arrangements

Paying for the arrangements that accompany the death of a loved one can be expensive. If a veteran is receiving monetary benefits from the Veteran Administration (VA), they will reimburse the person paying for the funeral arrangements, funeral home, burial and / or cremation up to \$2,000 for a service related death and up to \$700 for a non-service related death. Reimbursements will go to the person whose name is on the funeral cost receipts.

Veterans may also be buried at the closest and nicest cemetery in the area, which happens to be our very own Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon. As part of the ceremony, most veterans will receive military honors, a flag folding ceremony and TAPs by a professional Honor Guard. Veterans may also receive the Presidential Memorial Certificate which bears the current president's signature expressing the country's grateful recognition of their service. This is presented to a family member or next of kin. More than one certificate can be provided.

Additionally, veterans who are buried in private cemeteries are eligible for a free grave marker from the VA that can be ordered through the funeral home of your choice. Again, if you have any questions about these benefit services, my office can help.

Benefits for dependents of those who have passed away

Dependents of deceased veterans may also be eligible for benefits. Some of these benefits include Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for spouses married more than one-year to a veteran who died of a service related condition. Children may also be eligible to receive this benefit. In rare cases, parents may be able to receive DIC if they were totally dependent on the veteran for financial reasons or have extremely low income. Educational benefits may be available for spouses and children up to age 26 for all veterans who died of a service related condition.

In any event, this is a sad time for the families of veterans and the last thing we want you to have to worry about is making sure you have access to all the benefits to which you are entitled. Be sure to stop by my office to get help you need, that way you can spend your time honoring your loved one, not chasing down forms. We can also help you connect with other agencies that may need to be contacted after the death of a veteran, including the Social Security Administration, Defense Finance and Accounting System and the Casualty Branch at Travis Air Force Base. Come on by, we're here to help.

Ted Puntillo is Director of Veteran's Services for Solano County. Reach him at (707) 784-6590 or tepuntillo@SolanoCounty.com. The Solano County Veteran's Services Office, 675 Texas St. in Fairfield, is open from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

#