

Veterans Corner

Burial Benefit Update

A rule recent change at the US Department of Veterans Affairs now allows veterans to apply for burial in national cemeteries before their death, rather than requiring family members to apply on their behalf after it. Veteran burial benefits previously were approved at the "time of need." For families, that meant waiting until after the veteran died to apply for the benefits via fax or email by sending in a copy of the veteran's DD-214 or separation documents and then following up by phone. The rule change instead allows veterans to be approved for burial in a VA national cemetery "pre-need," or before death, through a form submitted by fax, email or mail. The form can be filled out by the veteran or by someone else on his or her behalf.

Burial locations are assigned based on availability at the time of need, VA officials said. Although veterans cannot reserve a gravesite, they can indicate on the form a cemetery preference. Doing so allows VA officials to predict need at cemeteries, and may help inform decisions for those choosing a burial site after the veteran's death, officials said. The predetermination process qualifies veterans for burial in 135 cemeteries and 33 soldiers' lots operated by the VA nationwide. The process does not include Arlington National Cemetery, which is operated by the U.S. Army and uses a different application system.

After receiving the burial benefits application, the VA will provide written notice of its decision regarding eligibility, officials said in a release. The decision and supporting documents will then be stored electronically by the VA to make burial arrangements faster when they are needed, they said.

In addition to burial in a national cemetery, the VA provides most veterans who were not dishonorably discharged with a government headstone or marker, a burial flag and a presidential memorial certificate after death. Some veterans' survivors also qualify for burial allowances, designed to cover some burial and funeral costs. Our office can assist with the application and answer any questions regarding this and many other benefits.

The Kings County Veterans Service Office can complete the DMV Veteran Status Verification Form for the new California Veteran Designation on your driver's license and also issues Veteran I.D. cards to honorably discharged veterans. Contact Scott Holwell if you would like to receive periodic veteran's information by email. There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To determine if you are eligible for any of these benefits, call or visit our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can get information on the Web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office webpage at www.countyofkings.com/vets.

Scott Holwell, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230; call (559)852-2669; or e-mail scott.holwell@co.kings.ca.us.