



A Practical Guide to Planning Your Funeral

The final act of kindness to your loved ones may come after your death in the form of well-planned funeral arrangements. As uncomfortable as the subject may seem, researching and documenting how you would like to be laid to rest is as much a benefit to yourself as it is to your loved ones. Do you wish to have military funeral honors? Would you like a military marker on your headstone? These are questions that your family must answer for you, if you do not plan now. JWV has created this Practical Guide to assist you with the task.

Veteran Funeral Planning Essentials

1. **Proof of Service:** Your family will need to prove that you were a veteran to receive your benefits and arrange services. If you do not have your Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD214), you may acquire a copy by:
 - a. Visiting <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records> and completing an online request
 - b. Downloading Form 180 here <http://www.archives.gov/research/order/standard-form-180.pdf> and mailing or faxing the completed form to the National Archives
 - c. Consulting with one of our National Service Officers. A full list is found here http://www.jwv.org/programs/service/service_officer_program and on the back of your JWV Calendar
2. **US Flag:** Your family may obtain a free US flag from a VA regional office and most Post Offices. Your family or funeral director submits the request along with:
 - a. VA Form 27-2008: Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes
 - b. Copy of your DD214 or Discharge Papers

TIP: Did you know that in absence of a DD 214, the VA will issue a flag when a statement is made by a person of established character and reputation that s/he personally knows the deceased to have been an honorably discharged veteran?

3. **Veteran Benefits:** Your benefits do not cover all the funeral arrangements.
 - a. Casket: Unless death occurs while active duty, caskets are not free.
 - b. Non-VA National Cemetery Burial: For service-related death, the VA will pay up to \$2000 of burial expenses at a private cemetery. Non-service-related, up to \$700, depending on eligibility. (VA Form 21-530)
 - c. Headstone or Marker: Upon request and at no charge, the VA will furnish a Government headstone or marker for a veteran's grave anywhere in the world. (VA Form 40-1330)



- d. **Bronze Medallion:** In lieu of a headstone, the VA will furnish a bronze medallion to be affixed to a privately purchased headstone. The medallion is free, but does not include fees to affix it to the headstone. (VA Form 40-1330)
 - e. **Service Medals, Decorations & Awards:** Next-of-kin may request replacement medals, generally at no charge.
4. **Veteran Honors:** At no charge, an eligible veteran is entitled to:
- a. **Military Funeral Honors:** Includes the folding of the US Flag and playing of TAPS. Generally, the funeral director will make the request.
 - b. **JWV Funeral Honors:** Speak with your local Post to learn what funeral services it offers. Some do a reading, some present the Colors, every Post does what it can.
 - c. **Presidential Memorial Certificate:** Signed by the current President, the Certificate is provided to your family upon request from your local VA office.
 - d. **US Flag:** See number two above.
5. **Burial:**
- a. **VA National Cemetery:** If you meet eligibility requirements, you can be buried or inurned in a VA National Cemetery. The VA will furnish the headstone and grave liner and the cemetery is maintained at no cost to the family. However, you may not reserve a space in the cemetery ahead of time, there is no guarantee that a family member will be interred nearby, and ceremonies are not conducted on weekends.
 - b. **Private Cemetery:** In many states you can pre-pay your funeral expenses through a trust account. Obtain a gravesite now, if possible. State funeral homes do not generally sell gravesites.

Read more about veteran burial benefits here http://www.cem.va.gov/burial_benefits/.

6. JWV Ceremonies and Markers

- a. **Ceremonies:** JWV has outlined services, eulogies and ceremonies for both the chapel and gravesite. Review pages 19 – 27 of *The Manual of Ceremonies* for complete details.
- b. **Marker:** In the past, JWV marked graves with bronze emblems. These emblems were often stolen, so the organization switched to a plastic shield that also functions as a flag holder. To purchase the markers and US flags, call our store manager Pat Ennis at 703-753-3733.

Links to both *The Manual of Ceremonies* and JWV's Online Store are available at www.jwv.org.



Questions to Consider While Planning Your Funeral

1. Do I wish to have my military service mentioned, fully described and/or honored? At the ceremony? At a reception?
2. How would I like to pay for my services?
3. Who will be in charge of carrying out my funeral arrangements? Does this person know where I keep my discharge papers and other important documents?
4. What military protocols or traditions might I want included at my funeral?
5. Do I want a simple, traditional, or elaborate funeral?
6. How do I wish to be laid to rest? What sort of headstone might I want?
7. Where do I want to be laid to rest? At which funeral home will I make arrangements?
8. Who would I like to speak at my funeral or reception?
9. Do I want my military service and/or JWV membership to be reflected on my headstone?
10. What organizations, such as JWV, should be informed of my passing?

Get started today!

1. Acquire copies of your DD214 as soon as possible.
2. Record your military story. Whether you choose to have your story read by your JWV Post at your funeral or not, help us fulfill our mission of showing the world that American Jews proudly serve. Write your war narrative and submit it to our Museum.
3. Choose at least two loved ones with whom you will share your plans. Inform them of your wishes. Give them access to the necessary documents.

In the meantime, live well, exercise and stay active in your JWV Post.