



MILITARY FUNERAL HONORS ARE YOUR RIGHT AS A VETERAN

Plan ahead to ensure that you will receive exactly what you want. It will make the arduous process much easier on your family.

BY ALLEN MOGOL

To some, the most meaningful tribute the federal government can pay veterans is the final one — providing military honors at his or her funeral. A veteran's burial benefits are outlined in *Public Law 106-65*, which was approved in 1999.

Upon request by his or her family, any eligible veteran will receive a military funeral honors ceremony. This includes:

- the folding and presenting of a U.S. burial flag;
- the playing of "Taps"; and
- the presence of a military funeral honors detail.

The law defines an appropriate honors detail as "consisting of two or more uniformed military persons, with at least one being a member of the veteran's parent service of the armed forces."

These honors are provided by the Department of Defense at no charge to the family.

But to receive military honors at a veteran's funeral, two conditions must be

met. First, the family must tell the funeral director that their loved one wanted the honors. Second, the family must be able to provide a *DD-214 (Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty)* or documentation showing the veteran received an honorable discharge.

"We had a situation where the family could not find either piece of paper, and no matter what we did, no way would military honors be provided," said Edward Yarmus, a funeral director at Plaza Jewish Community Chapel Inc. of New York City, and an Air Force veteran who served from 1962-67.

FIND RELEVANT DOCUMENTS NOW

When my father passed away last fall, I was fortunate to have had both conditions met. My father had told me the previous spring that he wanted military honors, which also can include honor guard pallbearers and a rifle volley at the cemetery, depending on local availability and ability.

When the funeral director asked what honors, if any, we wanted as the family of

Eligible veterans can receive military honors at their burials upon the request of their families. Benefits include the folding and presenting of a U.S. burial flag, the playing of "Taps" and the presence of a military funeral honors detail.

a veteran, I knew and was able to convey my father's wishes. The chapel took care of all the arrangements, including coordinating the presence of an honor detail.

We knew my father had been moved by honor details at funerals for his friends. Knowing that we were fulfilling his final wish for similar honors and that the Army was demonstrating its gratitude for his service was doubly moving for us. We display the folded flag in a place of honor to remind us of my father's service and its importance in his life.

To ensure these benefits, I was required to produce the proper documents. I knew exactly where to find my father's *DD-214* because I had helped him apply for a particular VA benefit that also required the form just a few weeks before he passed away.

A veteran should make sure his or her family has a *DD-214* (or an honorable discharge document) readily available as far in advance as possible so they won't have to search for it in the harried days following a death. The military will accept faxed or emailed copies from funeral directors.

If you don't already have either document, visit the National Archives at <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records> for information on how to get a copy. Planning ahead is key.

My best advice to veterans who want a military honors burial is don't wait to tell your family. Explain specifically what honors you want and make sure the required forms are easily accessible when needed.

For more information about benefits and eligibility, access <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials>. ★

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