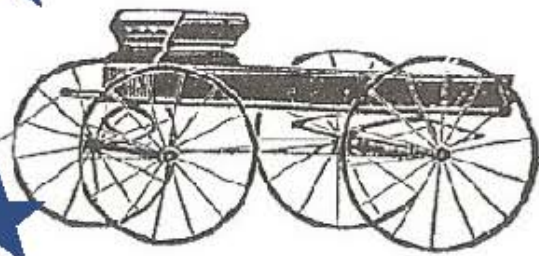


Ask the Undertaker



By Ryan Heffenbein

Over the centuries we have seen presidents pay tribute to the veterans who serve our country. The standard for honoring those who gave their lives for their country was set in 1862, when faced with mounting Civil War casualties, the Congress passed and President Abraham Lincoln signed into law the establishment of national cemeteries. Congress empowered Lincoln to acquire cemetery grounds and secure them to be used as national cemeteries for those who served, not just those who died. This became the very first federal legislation to solidify the concept of offering cemetery property as a veterans benefit. The Annapolis National Cemetery on Taylor Avenue and West Street was the second of 14 initially authorized by the legislation.

As an undertaker, it is an honor to assist the families of those who gave back to our country by serving in our U.S. military. Here are some of the general benefits available for veterans and their families, which will provide a better understanding of what our nation has to offer.

Because of the respect President Lincoln had for those who served so bravely, he passionately pushed and sought approval for an honorably discharged veteran, surviving spouse of a veteran and a dependent child of a veteran to be permitted to be laid to rest in a protected and maintained cemetery. Locally, we have state cemeteries located in the towns of Crownsville, Hurlock, Cheltenham, Owings Mills and Flintstone. In addition to these, we also have our local National Cemetery of Arlington outside Washington, DC. All of these cemeteries, both state and national, also offer ground burial and columbarium niches for cremation urns. Veterans who qualify for ground burial receive not only a grave space for themselves and their dependents, but also grave markers, outer enclosures in which the casket is placed, and maintenance and upkeep of the cemetery grounds.

You should be aware that a veteran does not have a choice of where the grave space will be located in the cemetery. It is not like a private cemetery where you can purchase that lovely grave space by the oak tree from a church or corporation or an eternal waterfront view overlooking a particular body of water. In a veterans cemetery, the representatives from the cemetery chooses the gravesite and reserves space for all other qualified family members.

So what if the veteran's spouse or dependent passes away first? The spouse can be buried in a veterans cemetery, but the veteran must sign stating that they, too, will be buried with the spouse in the future. What if the veteran remarries after losing a spouse? Sorry spouse number two, the veteran must be buried with the first spouse.

In addition to the cemetery property and what comes along with it, a veteran's family is also provided a US flag. The undertaker secures the flag on behalf of the family and can organize military honors to be performed. Military honors provide the family and friends of the veteran with a ceremony, which can be performed at a cemetery, funeral home, church or other location, to recognize the veteran's service. Included is the playing of taps, folding of the flag and presentation of the flag to the family. The military honors performed are completely determined by the service the veteran gave to our country. Sometimes honors include casket bearers, firing party, full band and even a caisson. This is determined through the discharge paperwork by the military or cemetery representative. The undertaker is informed of the honors to be provided and adjust the services accordingly.

Along with helping families arrange for a grave space, outer enclosure, grave marker, flag and military honors, undertakers can assist in securing a presidential certificate in honor of that veteran, reimbursement of particular costs associated with the funeral service and even financial

assistance through the Veterans Administration. The benefits that accrue to a particular veteran are typically determined at the time of passing. To learn more about what may be available to you and your family contact your local undertaker or visit <http://www.va.gov/>

President Lincoln not only wanted to pay tribute to service members who gave their life to our country by providing a proper burial, but he wanted to be sure each of their families and friends had a place to go in order to work through that grief. He realized that soldiers were not just soldiers, but fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and children of those left behind:

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow, and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." – President Lincoln's second inaugural address.

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Outlook's Bits & Bytes

To commemorate an anniversary, graduation or other memorable event, a flag that flew over the US Capital on your special day can be obtained through your US representative or senator's office. For more information, log onto www.aoc.gov/sites/default/files/flagform.pdf