



America's Defenders

Our National Cemeteries— Shrines To All Who Served

(NAPSA)—As it works to keep America's promise of a dignified and respectful burial for every veteran, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is also keeping its promise to America that national cemeteries will be maintained as shrines honoring all who have served in the U.S. military.

VA manages 120 national cemeteries in the United States and Puerto Rico, half of which date from the Civil War. As the median age of World War II veterans approaches 80, demand for national cemetery burial space will soon peak. VA plans to open new national cemeteries near Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Sacramento, Detroit and in southern Florida during the next few years, and is committed to bringing its older cemeteries up to standards of appearance characteristic of the finest in the world.

"Each national cemetery is a national shrine that expresses the appreciation and respect of a grateful nation for the service and sacrifice of her veterans," Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi said. "Our National Shrine Commitment program will insure that our national cemeteries rank among the best in the world."

VA surveyed cemeteries around the world to develop standards of appearance for national cemeteries and Congress has allocated funds for national shrine projects throughout the system, such as headstone repair, realignment and cleaning.

Veterans discharged from military service under conditions other than dishonorable and service members who die on active duty are generally eligible for free burial in a national cemetery.

VA provides a gravesite, grave-liner, headstone or marker, Presidential Memorial Certificate, U.S. flag and perpetual care of the national cemetery gravesite. It



also opens and closes the grave at no cost to the veteran's family. National cemetery gravesites cannot be reserved in advance, but veterans and their families can prepare in advance by discussing cemetery options, collecting the veteran's military discharge papers and by calling the desired national cemetery to discuss details. At time of need, a funeral director or next of kin should contact the national cemetery where burial is desired.

The Department of Defense (DoD) is responsible for providing military funeral honors for veterans upon request and funeral directors can make arrangements with local veterans organizations. For information about the DoD Military Funeral Honors Program, write Military Funeral Honors, 9504 IH-35, Suite 320, San Antonio, TX 78233-6635, or go to the military funeral honors Web site at www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil.

Information on VA burial benefits is available at national cemetery offices, from the VA National Cemetery Administration Web site at www.cem.va.gov or by calling VA Regional Offices toll free on 1-800-827-1000.