

# The Greatest Generation and Beyond

by Ryan Helfenbein

An elderly American absent-mindedly arrived at French immigration in Charles de Gaulle Airport and fumbled for his passport. "You have been to France before, monsieur?" the official asked. The American smiled and admitted that he had been to France before. "In that case you should know to have your passport ready for inspection," barked the ill-tempered officer. The American gently informed the Frenchman that the last time he came to France he did not have to show his passport or any other documents. "Impossible. You Americans always have to show your passports on arrival." The American gave the Frenchman a long hard look. "I assure you, young man, that when I came ashore on Omaha Beach in Normandy on D-Day in 1944, there was no one on the beach asking for passports." The Frenchman was speechless.

According to the National World War II Museum, out of the 16 million American veterans of WW II, it is estimated less than 700,00 are still living today. This "Greatest Generation" of soldiers is comprised of what some refer to as the most humble individuals to ever serve our country. The majority of these honorable veterans lost family members, friends and comrades, sometimes right in front of them, but they rarely request any benefits for their time spent protecting our freedom. Fortunately for these heroes, and for those who followed, the Veterans Administration provides some of the most cost-effective burial benefits the funeral industry has ever witnessed.

Before we get into who is eligible for these benefits, let's first explore what these burial benefits are and what kind of savings they allow. Those who qualify for burial benefits may be eligible to select gravesites from several national or state veterans cemeteries, a headstone or marker, military funeral honors and a United States flag. The option of a state veterans cemetery, such as Arlington or Quantico National Cemetery, is something we are very fortunate to have so nearby. Arlington National Cemetery, for example, is one of the most highly requested cemeteries in the country, and is said to hold between 20 and 30 services for individuals from all over the world every weekday. With these burial benefits offered, it not only provides an honorable resting place, but a hefty savings on traditional cemetery expenses. The savings to an eligible person can be as much as \$5,000 in comparison to similar services in corporately owned private cemeteries.

How do people know whether they are eligible for these burial benefits and ultimately such a generous savings on cemetery expenses? In general, benefits are available to active duty members, honorably discharged veterans, spouses and dependent children. The Department of Veterans Affairs has the primary responsibility for verifying eligibility; but here is a quick guide for eligibility in each of the categories:

## VETERANS

Any member of the U.S. Armed Forces who dies on active duty or was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable and has completed the required period of service is automatically eligible.

## SPOUSES

The spouse, widow or widower of an eligible veteran is also eligible with certain restrictions on subsequent marriages. If these benefits are used in a state veterans cemetery, there is a nominal fee associated for use of the spousal benefits (typically well under \$1,000).

## CHILDREN

Unmarried, minor children who are under the age of 21 (this age is extended to 23 for children in an approved educational institution) of an eligible veteran or active duty member of the armed forces are eligible. Adult children who are incapable of supporting themselves due to a permanent disability sustained prior to reaching age 21 may also be eligible.

The Veterans Administration does an admirable job in offering these benefits and giving a final "thank you" to those who have served, but as Memorial Day approaches, don't forget how important it is for you to take a moment to recognize the service of those who have served or who are currently serving in the armed services.

