

Date: January 29, 2013

From: Executive Director, VA Service and Distribution Center (003A3B3)

Subj: Memorandum 796-13-01, Guidance for the Distribution and Replenishment of Burial Flags

To: US Postal Service Postmasters; Directors, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Regional Offices (VARO), National Cemeteries (NCA) and VA Medical Centers (VAMC)

1. Purpose: This memorandum provides instructions to VA medical centers, regional offices and United States Post Offices for facilitating the storage and distribution of burial flags for VA by the VA Service and Distribution Center (SDC), Hines, IL, and rescinds Office of Acquisition and Logistics Information Letter IL 001AL-10-01: Guidance for the Distribution and Replenishment of Burial Flags. It is also intended to provide the necessary information and points of contact for this program. In many cases, a working arrangement already exists between the post office, medical center, and regional office in an area. This memorandum is not intended to replace those functioning systems as long as they meet two main criteria:

- a. They provide for replenishment of flags in a timely manner to US Post Offices to ensure continuous availability
- b. They allow for timely submission of VA Form 27-2008s to the VBA regional office(s) for First Notification of Death (FNOD) processing

2. Obtaining a Flag:

a. Applicants seeking a burial flag will be required to submit a completed copy of VA Form 27-2008, Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes and attach a copy of DD 214, Certificate of Release or Discharged from Active Duty; or other documentation that contains acceptable evidence of the eligibility of the deceased Veteran whenever possible. The most current version of VA Form 27-2008 may be downloaded at:

<http://www.va.gov/oal/government/sdc/burialFlags.asp>

IMPORTANT NOTE: The issue of a flag may not be delayed or refused because appropriate documentation is not available at the time of request.

b. VA is committed to furnishing burial flags to drape the caskets of deceased Veterans who were honorably discharged from the military. When flag eligibility is in doubt, the nearest VA office may be contacted for assistance in clarifying the deceased Veteran's status; however, due to time sensitivity, a properly completed 27-2008 verifying eligibility will be accepted.

c. Normally the family of the deceased Veteran or a funeral director acting on their behalf may apply for the flag. A flag may be issued subsequent to interment when circumstances prevent securing one to drape the casket. There is no time limit for request of a flag. Only one flag may be issued for each deceased Veteran.

3. Initial Issue and Replenishment Process for Issuing Offices:

a. Post offices will accept VA Form 27-2008, Application for United States Flag for Burial Purposes, ensuring all appropriate information is completed, and issue one flag per veteran. Under no circumstances should flags be issued without a properly completed form. Forms must be completed by the post office and mailed to the appropriate regional office **within three days of receipt** to ensure timely notification of death to the VA. Post offices should ensure that a legible address is entered into the issuing office blocks to ensure a replenishment flag can be issued.

b. All offices issuing flags, i.e. U.S. post offices, VAMCs and national cemeteries, should have an assigned VA Regional Office (VARO) and point of contact at that facility for requesting replenishment of flags. All issuing offices are initially supplied with an operating inventory of flags based upon demand and other local conditions. An initial supply of flags for new issuing offices should be obtained by requesting an initial stock from the VA SDC who will supply the flags and assign the new post office to the appropriate VARO for future replenishment support. The SDC will forward a copy of the assignment letter to the VARO with initial POC information. For initial stock or in the event of a problem with the replenishment process, the SDC Operations Division, Hines, Illinois may be contacted for assistance by sending an e-mail message to Flags.Interment@va.gov, or in an emergency by phoning (708) 786-7758 or 7509. If necessary, the SDC Director's Office may also be contacted at (708) 786-7502/7505. When placing replenishment orders for flags, issuing offices should provide their servicing VARO with all the completed VA Form 27-2008s they have collected.

c. U.S. Postal Service (USPS) offices and VAROs may view the most current list of VA Regional Office points of contact at the SDC website <http://www.va.gov/oal/government/sdc/burialFlags.asp>. Post offices currently being replenished directly by the VA Service and Distribution Center in Hines IL will continue to do so by submitting VA Forms 27-2008 and accompanying documentation to the SDC.

4. Replenishment Process for VA Regional Offices:

a. Issuing offices will forward a completed VA Form 27-2008 to the VARO servicing the issue point, ensuring the lower portion is fully completed in support of the replenishment action. The Veterans Service Center (VSC) manager or delegate will ensure that the lower portion of the VAF 27-2008 is completed and forwarded to the appropriate VAMC functioning as an area distribution point, triggering replenishment of a replacement flag. The lower portion of the VA 27-2008 must be forwarded to the VAMC distribution point as soon as received. The top portion of the completed VAF 27-2008 should be forwarded to the NCA FNOD team for first notice of death (FNOD) processing. The current address for FNOD burial flag application processing is:

Memorial Programs Service (41A1)
Department of Veterans Affairs
5109 Russell Road
Quantico, VA 22134-3903

IMPORTANT NOTE: This address is primarily for VA Regional Office use, however, any VA facility which receives and processes VA Form 27-2008 are required to forward the completed form and accompanying documentation to FNOD as quickly as possible

b. The VSC manager or delegate is responsible for periodically surveying issuing offices within their jurisdiction to ensure an adequate supply of flags and application forms is available. The VSC manager or delegate will also ensure current area distribution point addresses and points of contact (POC) are current and functioning in support of the replenishment process. The VARO mailroom staff will forward the lower portion of the completed application on a daily basis to the VAMC Distribution Center having primary responsibility for replenishing the stock of burial flags at the post offices.

5. Replenishment Process for Area Distribution Points (VAMCs):

a. While all VAMCs are authorized to order and issue burial flags for internal requirements (i.e. death of a hospitalized Veteran), only specific VAMC's across the country are designated as area distribution points for burial flags. Other VA facilities such as regional offices, national cemeteries, etc., may also act as distribution points in some areas. The designated official at each distribution point, under the direction of the facility director, will normally establish a stock level of flags based upon usage and storage capacity. The facility director will direct the support of this program using VAMC assets and personnel as necessary. Each VAMC serving as an area distribution point should continuously monitor its on hand inventory and establish stock levels consistent with the number of requests it receives for flags via the lower portion of the VAF 27-2008. Upon receipt of a lower portion of the VAF 27-2008(s) from the VARO, the distribution point will mail the appropriate number of burial flags to the corresponding issuing post office directly.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Flag replenishments must be shipped immediately upon receipt of the replenishment request in order to ensure that issuing post offices do not deplete their stock of flags. VAMCs may not set batch requirements. i.e., only shipping in case lots.

In addition, each VAMC will establish facility and point of contact (phone number) information for each VARO and issuing office they support. Area distribution offices (VAMCs) will replenish their own supply of burial flags (stock number F91432) by placing orders utilizing the FPOrders system referred to above. This ordering system is available via the VA intranet or by means of an on line computer session with the VA Austin Automation Center. All orders will be filled and shipped within 4 workdays of receipt. National cemeteries and VAROs are also eligible to establish an FPOrders account and receive direct shipments of flags from the SDC.

b. In an emergency situation, flags may be obtained directly by contacting the SDC Operations Division at (708) 786-7758 or 7509. Additional assistance, if necessary, is also available by phoning the SDC Director's Office at (708) 786-7502.

c. If approved, all emergency shipments will require specific documentation validating the number of flags requested as well as the conditions precipitating the request. It is the responsibility of the VAMC director at each area distribution point to support the distribution process with appropriate resources and to maintain accountability for flags received.

d. When shipping flags, area distribution points should ensure that a label with the return address of the area distribution point always appears on boxes shipped to post offices. This serves a dual purpose by helping the post office identify its servicing area distribution office in the event that point of contact information is misplaced or lost. It provides a return address for the flags if they are delivered to the wrong address or are undeliverable for any other reason.

6. Distribution from the Service and Distribution Center (SDC):

a. The VA distributes on average 500,000 burial flags annually from the SDC to other VA components at multiple distribution points across the country. Those distribution points are comprised of VAMCs, community based outpatient clinics, regional offices, national cemeteries, and at times, U.S. embassies around the world. In some locations, U.S. Post Offices are also supplied directly by the SDC. In such cases, VA Form 27-2008s received by the SDC will be forwarded to the VA FNOD office for processing. No completed 27-2008s will be retained by the SDC.

b. The supply chain begins with the SDC receiving interment flags based on pre-determined delivery schedules established in conjunction with VA contracts solicited and awarded by the Office of Acquisition and Logistics in VA Central Office. Contracts are awarded to a variety of flag manufacturers who produce high quality flags in accordance with Federal Specification DDD-F-416F and/or Commercial Description A-A-52696 dated August 5, 2006.

c. The SDC strives to maintain, on average, a 6 month supply of flags in its warehouse located in Building 37 of the Hines, Illinois, VA campus. This inventory level is deemed adequate to compensate for any potential disruptions in the production of the flags (i.e. plant fires, material shortages, etc). Flags are then supplied by the SDC to the area distribution points, who place orders with the SDC Operations Division utilizing the on line FPOrders program. Where necessary, and with concurrence of the Chief of the SDC Operations Division, faxes, e-mails, phone calls or written requests for replenishment may be allowed, but use of FPOrders is the preferred method. Orders will be shipped within 4 business days to the requesting facility either via common carrier, FedEx ground or other suitable means of shipment based on quantity. Overnight emergency shipments are at the discretion of SDC management.

d. The majority of flags are distributed to the next-of -kin of deceased Veterans or more often to funeral directors, acting on their behalf, by U.S. Post Offices across the country.

e. The post offices are, in turn, replenished by a VA field component, usually a VAMC, located within a reasonable distance of the issuing office at the direction of the assigned VARO. The VA facility serving as the immediate distribution point for post offices in its geographic area replenishes its own stock by ordering flags from the SDC via FPOrders.

7. Flags for Training Purposes:

a. Flags with minor defects rendering them unsuitable for issue to the families of Veterans are available from the SDC and may be provided to Veterans Service Groups, National Guard and Active Duty Burial Detachments, or other organizations providing military honors for Veteran's funerals. Training Flags will be clearly marked "for training use only" and may be ordered by contacting the SDC via email or by telephone.

8. Unserviceable or Returned Flags:

a. Flags received at a post office damaged or with obvious manufacturing defects should be returned for direct replacement to:

VA Service and Distribution Center
Attention: Chief of Operations
Bldg 37
1st Ave 1 Block North of Cermak
Hines, IL 60141

b. Flags rendered unserviceable through wear and tear should be disposed of locally IAW U.S. Code, Title 4, Chapter 1, Section 8; preferably by burning. There is no provision for issuing more than one flag per Veteran, or replacements for damaged or lost flags.

9. Area Distribution Point Listing: See attached listing. Also available at the VA SDC internet site found above.

10. Regional Office POC listing: See attached listing. Also available at the VA SDC internet site found above.

11. References:

VBA Fast Letter 09-23, Transfer of Burial Flag Application Processing to the National Cemetery Administration (NCA)

VA Pamphlet 21-02-1, VA Benefits for Survivors

VA M21-1MR, Part VII, Chapter 5, Section B

VA Form 27-2008 dated July 2012

USPS Administrative Support Manual (ASM) 13, Section 474, U.S. Burial Flags

/s/Neal W. Kemp
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Office of Acquisition and Logistics

Attachment 1 to SDC Memorandum 796-13-1

