

Services Cemeteries

NZ has specific areas within cemeteries for people with certain military service, as well as their spouse or partner.

There are over 180 Services Cemeteries throughout NZ. Local councils can choose to set aside a part of a cemetery for the burial of certain service members and their spouse or partner.

Find a Services Cemetery (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/remembrance/service-cemeteries-and-memorials/find-a-service-cemetery/>)

Burial in a Services Cemetery

Burial in a Services Cemetery is available to service members — and their spouse or partner — if they have been on certain deployments. Burial is available regardless of the cause of death.

Find out about burial in a Services Cemetery (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/a-z/burial-in-a-service-cemetery/>)

Maintenance

Responsibility for the maintenance of Services Cemeteries is shared between Veterans' Affairs, local councils, RSAs, and other interested veteran groups. While we fund some maintenance and improvements, much of this work is done by volunteers. The high standard of presentation is a tribute to their efforts.

Our maintenance provider regularly visits all Services Cemeteries on our behalf. This helps us to assess what and where work is needed. However, we are always keen to hear from local communities who have concerns about their Services Cemetery. Please get in touch with us if you:

- have concerns about a health and safety risk at a Services Cemetery
- would like to ensure maintenance is completed at a Services Cemetery in time for a commemorative event.

Contact us (<https://www.veteransaffairs.mil.nz/contact-us/>)

More information

A brief history of Services Cemeteries

War Graves — which we know now as Services Cemeteries — were set up during the First World War by the families and communities of service personnel who had died in service to New Zealand. There has never been an overarching body in New Zealand that has cared for cemeteries. Instead, cemeteries were created and cared for by communities. This practice was influenced by the treatment of urupā, which are tended to by iwi and hapū. So like other cemeteries in New Zealand, interested people cared for the graves in Services Cemeteries.

The Imperial War Graves Commission, later the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, was established in 1917. It created guidelines for what constituted a war grave and established standards of uniformity so that all graves would appear and be treated the same.

War graves are defined as interring those who died as members of His Majesty's Forces, including Imperial and Allied forces, between 4 August 1914 and 31 August 1921, and after the Second World War, between 3 September 1939 and 31 December 1947.

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The care for these graves included permanent grave work, which was defined by the Commission as erecting headstones and grassing graves. This work eventually needed maintenance, which was carried out by Public Works at the government's expense.

Services Cemeteries as we know them today were established by Internal Affairs and the Royal Returned and Services Association (RNZRSA). They were collaborative, with both organisations as well as communities and local government all involved in their care.

Initially, those eligible for burial in Services Cemeteries were returned service people, those who died before the date of official peace, and those who died as a result of their service. This included members of Imperial and Allied forces who had fought alongside New Zealand forces.

Services Cemeteries now

Manatū Taonga — Ministry for Culture and Heritage is the New Zealand agent for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and is responsible for war graves. They are also responsible for the graves of those who died in the New Zealand Wars and conflicts before the First World War.

Veterans' Affairs has been responsible for New Zealand's 183 services cemeteries since 1999, which are mostly separate sections located in public cemeteries and managed by local councils.

Eligibility for interment in a services cemetery under the Burial and Cremation Act 1964 is different to eligibility under the Veterans' Support Act 2014. Under the Burial and Cremation Act 1964 veterans with Operational Service are eligible for burial in a services cemetery.

What Veterans' Affairs does for Services Cemeteries

Veterans' Affairs covers the cost of official standard plaques or headstones for veterans eligible to be buried in services cemeteries. For eligible veterans buried elsewhere, Veterans' Affairs contributes to the cost of plaques and headstones. Permission for all burials in services cemeteries are decided by cemetery managers.

Once the plaque or headstone has been provided and installed it legally becomes the property of the family and any decision regarding it or the grave also rests with them. Replacement of plaques or headstones is done in consultation with the family and any cleaning is done by families or community groups with their permission.

Local Authority regulations generally require Veterans' Affairs and any interested parties undertaking any work on gravestones to have explicit permission from the family of the person interred.

Veterans' Affairs is funded to support local authorities to maintain Services Cemeteries. Our contractor, Bronze Plaques NZ, is employed to manufacture and install plaques and headstones. They also inspect all services cemeteries over a two year period and manage any maintenance work, which is sub-contracted to local providers.