



Department of
Veterans Affairs

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

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Fact Sheet

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VA's Headstones and Markers

Upon request, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) furnishes, at no charge to the applicant, a headstone or marker for the grave of any eligible veteran in any cemetery around the world. For deaths that occurred before Sept. 11, 2001, VA may furnish a headstone or marker only for graves that are not already marked with a private headstone.

Headstones and markers are provided for eligible spouses and dependents of veterans only in national, military post or state veterans cemeteries. Spouses and dependents buried in private cemeteries are not eligible for a government headstone or marker.

Flat bronze, granite or marble markers and upright granite and marble headstones are available. The style chosen must be consistent with existing monuments at the place of burial. Niche markers are also available to mark columbaria used for inurnment of cremated remains.

Eligibility

Any deceased veteran discharged from the U.S. armed forces under conditions other than dishonorable is eligible for a government headstone or marker.

Service after Sept. 7, 1980, must be for a minimum of 24 consecutive months or be completed under special circumstances (e.g., death on active duty). Persons who have only limited active duty service for training while in the National Guard or Reserves are not eligible unless there are special circumstances (e.g., death while on duty or as a result of training). Persons with 20 years of service in the National Guard or Reserves who are entitled to retired pay are also eligible for a government headstone or marker. A copy of the *Reserve Retirement Eligibility Benefits Letter* (commonly called the "Twenty-Year Letter") must accompany the application. Active duty service (other than active duty for training) while in the National Guard or Reserves also establishes eligibility.

For death occurring on and after Sept. 11, 2001, any deceased active duty servicemember or eligible veteran discharged from the U.S. armed forces under conditions other than dishonorable is entitled to a government-furnished headstone or marker. If the death occurred before Sept. 11, 2001, by law VA may only furnish a headstone or marker if the grave is unmarked.

Further information about eligibility can be found on VA's National Cemetery Administration Web site at <http://www.cem.va.gov>.

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How to Order a Government Headstone or Marker

Cemetery officials will order the headstone or marker if the veteran is buried or memorialized in a national, post or state veterans cemetery. When burial is in a private cemetery, VA Form 40-1330, *Application for Standard Government Headstone or Marker*, must be mailed or faxed, along with a copy of the veteran's military discharge documents. Do not mail original documents because they will not be returned. Funeral directors often assist in preparing the application.

A printable copy of the application form and instructions are available on the VA Web site at <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/40-1330.pdf>. VA Form 40-1330 and application information may be obtained from any VA regional office or national cemetery or by calling 1-800-827-1000. Completed applications and documents may be faxed toll-free to 1-800-455-7143 or mailed to:

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

Inscriptions

Government-furnished headstones and markers must be inscribed with the legal name of the deceased, branch of service, and years of birth and death, in that order. Memorial markers must also include "*In Memory Of*" at the top. If space is available, the inscription may also contain any or all of the following: veteran's rank, war service, military decorations and awards, and month and day of birth and death. All of these items must be inscribed in English.

An emblem of belief also may be inscribed. A listing of the approved emblems for inscription (attached) is on the VA Web site and also on the back of the VA 40-1330 application form.

If space is available and the requested inscription is respectful and in good taste, additional personalized inscriptions may be added at the bottom of the headstone or marker with VA's approval. Examples include terms of endearment ("beloved brother and son"; "loving wife and mother", etc.), nicknames ("Poppy", "Funny Face", etc.), and affiliation with military components (Women's Army Corps, WAC, WAVES, etc.) or veterans groups. Civilian titles such as Doctor or Reverend, or any other additions to the legal name, are not permitted on the mandatory name line of the headstone or marker, but may be added as part of the additional inscription at the bottom of the marker.

Additional inscriptions may be in any language as long as they use characters of the Latin alphabet (A, B, C, ... 1, 2, 3...etc.). Letters and numbers may be used, and where appropriate, accent marks such as the tilde, ampersand, parenthesis, colon and hyphen. When requesting an additional inscription in a language other than English, the request must include the English-language translation of the inscription.

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No graphics (logos, symbols, etc.) are permitted on government headstones and markers other than approved emblems of belief, the Civil War Union Shield, the Civil War Confederate Southern Cross of Honor and the Medal of Honor insignia.

When requesting military awards in the inscription, documentation must be provided with *VA Form 40-1330*. Usually, this information is found in the veteran's military discharge documents. Military awards and decorations (including those from foreign governments), other than those listed in Block 8 of the application, may be added if space is available. They should be requested in Block 27. Awards and decorations will not be inscribed without documentation to support the request.

A veteran's spouse or other non-veteran dependent buried in a private cemetery is not eligible for a government headstone or marker. However, the applicant may reserve inscription space below the veteran's inscription so that the non-veteran dependent's commemorative data can be inscribed later by private arrangement at private expense, when the non-veteran dependent is buried. Alternatively, the non-veteran dependent's name and date of birth can be added at government expense if requested on the application for the veteran's headstone or marker. When the non-veteran dependent is buried, the date of death may then be added at private expense.

Checking Your Headstone or Marker Order Status

It generally takes 30 to 60 days to process an application and have the headstone or marker produced and delivered. To check on the status, VA provides assistance toll-free at 1-800-697-6947 between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday ET.

Applicants may also e-mail about the status of an order to mps.headstones@va.gov. When inquiring by e-mail, be sure to include the veteran's full name, social security number (and/or service number), date of death and any information about the veteran's service that may be helpful in locating records. Please allow at least three business days for a response. Telephone and e-mail customer service representatives do not have access to information about other VA benefits. To inquire about other VA benefits, call 1-800-827-1000.

Shipping Government Headstones and Markers

Government-furnished headstones and markers are shipped free of charge.

Setting Government Headstones and Markers

Cemetery staff in national or military cemeteries will set the headstone or marker at no cost to the applicant. However, some state veterans' cemeteries and most private cemeteries charge a fee for setting a government headstone or marker. That expense is not reimbursed by the government.

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Replacement of Headstones and Markers

Government headstones and markers may be replaced at government expense when badly deteriorated, illegible, vandalized or stolen. The government will also replace a headstone or marker if it is damaged; the material or workmanship are of poor quality; it contains inscription errors; it is different from what was requested on the application; or it is not permitted by the cemetery.

If cemetery personnel damage a government headstone or marker located in a private cemetery, it should be replaced at the expense of the cemetery.

If a marble or granite headstone or marker is permanently removed from a grave, it must be destroyed beyond legibility. Bronze markers must be returned to the contractor for recycling. (Please contact Memorial Programs Service at 1-800-697-6947 or by e-mail at mps.headstones@va.gov for guidance on returning bronze markers.)

Memorial Headstones and Markers

Memorial headstones and markers are provided for deceased active-duty service members and veterans whose remains were not recovered or identified, were buried at sea, donated to science or scattered after cremation. These headstones and markers – which can be for an individual or a group – bear an “*In Memory Of*” inscription as their first line. They must be placed in a recognized cemetery.

Memorial headstones and markers may also be furnished, for placement in national, military or state veterans cemeteries only, for spouses and dependents whose remains are unavailable for burial, regardless of whether they predecease the veteran. They are not available to place in private cemeteries.

Civil War-Era Headstones and Markers

There are specific styles of upright headstones and flat markers to mark the graves of Union and Confederate Civil War and Spanish-American War dead. Proof of military service before World War I requires documentation, such as muster rolls, extracts from state files, pension documents or land warrants, to apply for a government headstone or marker.

Memorial markers usually are not provided to memorialize Civil War soldiers whose burial locations are unknown. The mere fact that the location of a grave is not known is not sufficient reason to furnish a government headstone or marker. If, however, documentation shows a soldier was buried in a particular cemetery or a mass grave, even if the actual location of the grave is unknown, VA will provide a memorial marker.

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Authorized Emblems of Belief for Inscription on Government Headstones and Markers

Aaronic Order Church
Atheist
Bahai Nine-Pointed Star
Buddhist (Wheel of Righteousness)
Christian
Christian and Missionary Alliance
Christian Church
Christian Reformed Church
Christian Scientist (Cross and Crown)
Church of World Messianity (Izunome)
Community of Christ
Eckankar
Episcopal Cross
Greek Cross
Hindu
Humanist Emblem of Spirit
Izumo Taishakyo Mission of Hawaii
Judaism (Star of David)
Konko-Kyo Faith
Lutheran Cross
Mormon (Angel Moroni)
Muslim (Crescent and Star)
Muslim (Islamic Five-Pointed Star)
Native American Church of America
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Presbyterian Cross
Russian Orthodox Cross
Seicho-No-Ie
Serbian Orthodox Cross
Sikh (Khanda)
Soka Gakkai International (USA)
Sufism Reoriented
Tenrikyo Church
Unitarian Church (Flaming Chalice)
United Church of Christ
United Church of Religious Science
United Methodist Church
United Moravian Church
Wicca (Pentacle)

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