

VA Markers and Medallions for Veterans

Markers are provided by the VA for unmarked veteran's graves or as replacements for a well-worn VA marker. Medallions are provided by the VA to affix to a private marker on a veteran's grave.

~~First off, you do not need to be related in any way to a particular veteran to order a VA marker for that veteran but it helps to be a relative.~~

Oops, I should have read further. There are some new rules (July 1, 2009) which now require that it be a relative of the veteran who requests a marker or medallion from the VA.

Go to <<http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/hmqa.asp>> for a listing of specific relatives. But, the last paragraph there says, "NCA will also accept applications from funeral home directors, cemetery officials, and Department of Defense appointed Casualty Assistance Officers, since they generally are authorized to represent the decedent or the NOK..." So, in certain cases, I was right, you don't have to be a relative but it sure helps.

However, you may run into cemetery rules in the cemetery where the veteran is buried. Therefore, first check with the cemetery about your desire to obtain a VA Marker or Medallion for a specific veteran. Make sure that veteran is buried there and in what plot. Is the veteran's grave already marked? It makes a difference in the type of marker or medallion the VA will provide.

One of the first things to do is go to <<http://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-1330.pdf>> and download the application and instruction form for a marker. This is a PDF form and will require an Adobe reader. That is a very common and free program which, if it isn't already on your computer, it should be.

This download is a complex and large form (1.85 MB). (Hint: if you know how, first, clean out your computer's "Temporary Internet Files" because you may need the room.) Once it is downloaded, check all four pages to make sure everything arrived as expected. Page three is the actual order form and has some blue tinted spaces. Make sure you received that page with those blue tinted spaces.

As soon as you are sure you have the correct and total copy, save it the same as you would save any other document. Keep it handy for reference and for printing your order. There will be more about this later (including what the blue tint is used for). You might print a copy of all four pages just to have a 'hard copy' to refer to as you go through the process.

Two types of markers are currently supplied by the Veteran's Administration (technically, "The United States Department of Veteran Affairs" <<http://www.va.gov/>>) for the graves of U. S. Veterans and Confederate States Veterans (U. S. Civil War). The first place to look is on a particular page on the VA website: <http://www.cem.va.gov/hm_hm.asp>. This page provides a series of links to the information about specific subjects and procedures and serves as a great guideline to the information you will need to obtain a marker or medallion for a veteran's grave.

Grave markers come in various styles, the most common is the upright, white stone with a rounded top (U. S. Veteran) or a pointed top (Confederate Veteran). This is the type used in all National Cemeteries.



This type of marker can also be obtained for placement in private cemeteries, depending on the particular cemetery's rules for markers.

There are also flat markers available in either stone or bronze and small bronze plaques for crematory sites. The small plaques may also be used 'in memorial' for those whose ashes were scattered and for those who were lost at sea.



Recently, the VA has started issuing medallions which can be affixed to a private (non-VA) grave marker. They come in three sizes, 5 inch, 3 inch and 1-1/2 inch. Information about all the markers and medallions can be found on page < <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/hmtype.asp> >.

Currently, the same order form is used for all markers and medallions but the medallions require some special entries in specific boxes. Pay attention the instructions on the medallion page.

It is really not a complicated process to obtain a grave marker or medallion for a veteran. But there are some steps which must be taken and I shall attempt to describe the most important of these.

Of first importance is the proving that the veteran was actually a veteran. Go to this page on the VA site: <<http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/dischdocs.asp>>. There you will find a list of documents that are acceptable as proof. There are about a hundred different documents that can be used and they are listed there by form number (DD-214) and title ("Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty").

Here are a couple of highlights about acceptable documents. Since 1950 all the U. S. military services have used form DD-214. If you have this document, that is probably all the proof you will need. Prior to 1950, each service used its own form and, over time, several different forms. One document most would not think of is the Military ID card, form DD-2. Check in his or her wallet, you never know what you might find.

There is something else which will complicate matters in your search for documentation. In 1973 there was a fire in St Louis which destroyed 80% of the U.S. Army personnel records from 1912 through 1960. It also destroyed 75% of U. S. Air Force records from 1947 through 1964. If your veteran served in WWI or WWII or Korea, the chances are that those records no longer exist in the government archives. For further information about what was destroyed, go to < <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/fire-1973.html> >.

Another place to look for veteran's discharge records is in the County Recorder's records. The problem is, of the over 3,000 counties in the U. S., which County Recorder? Where was the veteran's home at the time of his or her discharge? Where did he or she first establish permanent residence? That's the county to start with. Use the Internet and go to the County Recorder's site and look for Military Records. They will probably not be available on line! They are treated as confidential information and not released to the general public. Instructions for obtaining a copy, providing the veteran recorded his discharge with that County Recorder, should be on that same site. Be sure to state why you need a copy of the document when you make your request. Also include the date of death and any other information which might be helpful.

Two other places to look for a veteran's proof of service are the cemetery in which the veteran is buried and the funeral home which handled the services or the County Coroner. The veteran's Death Certificate should list these. They all keep records and are usually willing to share information and make copies for a worthwhile cause (such as obtaining a marker).

Always, always check with the cemetery. The markers will be delivered by the VA to the cemetery. Someone from the cemetery must sign the application form and be willing to accept

delivery. Any expenses, such as setting a stone, are your responsibility. Everything up to and including the delivery of the marker to the cemetery is paid by the VA.

When you have the required proof of service (documentation) and are ready to order the marker or medallion, read or review the instructions and requirements on VA Form 40-1330. That's the PDF form you downloaded earlier.

Now for those blue tinted spaces and the boxes they cover. These are 'fill in the blank' areas but with some unusual characteristics. When the form is on your computer screen, you can put the cursor inside any of the blue tinted boxes and type in information. Usually the Tab Key will move you from one box to the next (Shift+Tab moves you backwards). Use the space bar to enter check marks ("X") in the proper boxes.

It can be frustrating, but once you leave that document all the information you entered may be gone! You must print that page before leaving the document or start all over again. There is an exception to this and that is to 'Save' the document first. Your computer should caution you that this will overwrite the previous copy (the one you downloaded and saved). If you do this, you no longer have a blank form. That's ok if you are only doing one but not if you are doing a dozen. An alternative is to 'Save As' and give the document a new name so you wind up with two documents: one blank and one filled in. Just make sure to retain the PDF designation. If you can figure it out, save just Page Three of the application form. That is the only one of the three pages that needs to be sent to the VA.

Or you can print the page and fill in the blanks by hand. That is not a bad idea. Print out just Page Three (the order blank) and use a pencil to enter the information as you find it. Then bring up the document, scroll down to the first blue tinted box and start entering the information from your 'work sheet' and 'Print' before saving or closing the document.

Directions for filling in the form are on pages one and two as well as the form itself. Be sure to read and follow those instructions. You do not need to fill in all the blank spaces but you do need to enter all the information you have about the veteran and any other information that is required.

Make sure that everybody who needs to sign the form has signed the form before you mail it. Make certain that the required documents are included in the same envelope with the application form.

There are a few organizations actively searching for veteran's graves. Two hereditary organizations are the "Sons of the American Revolution" < <http://www.sar.org/> > and the "Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War" < <http://www.suvcw.org/graves/graves.htm> >. They are, respectively, looking for all Revolutionary War veterans' graves and for U. S. Civil War veterans' graves both Union and Confederate. These are just two and there are bound to be others. It is not unusual for these organizations to conduct services at previously unmarked graves when markers are placed. If you should locate either a Revolutionary War veteran or a Civil War veteran, let them know about your discovery.



If you are having trouble proving a veteran's service, you might check with a hereditary or a veteran's organization such as the "American Legion" or the "Veterans of Foreign Wars." Perhaps they can assist you. They have records that might just contain the exact document you need.

Above all, keep working until the marker or medallion is in place. Every veteran deserves as much.