

VA Markers and Medallions for Veterans

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An aside to all veterans and their families: It would be a good idea to read this article then gather the required documents and forms. Fill in as much of the form for a marker or a medallion as you can and keep it with a copy with your DD-214. When the time comes, you will have saved a loved one a lot of looking, searching and heartache.

Markers may be provided by the VA, technically known as the “U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs” (<http://www.va.gov/>) for unmarked veteran’s graves or as replacements for a well-worn VA Marker. Medallions may also be provided by the VA to affix to a private marker on a veteran’s grave. These are for veteran’s graves in cemeteries other than a National Cemetery. A veteran buried in a National Cemetery is automatically provided with a marker.

Both markers and medallions are provided at no cost. The VA pays for everything including the shipping costs to deliver a marker to a specific cemetery or to mail a medallion to the applicant. Caution: the cemetery may have a ‘setting’ fee to place the marker or the medallion. The VA does not pay this!

There used to be a very narrow group of people (namely those defined by the VA as the veteran’s next of kin) who could apply for a VA Marker or Medallion. But, things change. Go to this web site for the current: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/38/38.600>. In (a)(1)(i) it states “... and any lineal or collateral descendant of the decedent.” Basically any relative may be the next of kin for purposes of ordering a marker or medallion. However, the closer the relationship is to the veteran the better. (That is a significant change since I first wrote this article.)

Before even starting to order a marker or medallion, check with the cemetery! Tell them 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. VA Markers come in several shapes and sizes and the local cemetery may only accept certain types.

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.

VA Markers

Two types of markers (upright and flat) are currently supplied by the VA 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’s website: <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hmm/types.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 might 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 the National Cemeteries. This type of marker can also be obtained for placement in private cemeteries, depending on the particular cemetery’s rules for markers.

Flat markers are 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. Photos of all the markers offered are on the order form.

First 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 (1.92 MB). (Hint: if you know how, first, clean out your computer's "Temporary Internet Files" because it can use 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 several blue tinted spaces. Make sure you received that page with those blue tinted spaces. If any of the four pages is missing, delete that form and download again.

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.

VA Medallions

Within the past few years, the VA 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 (they are actually a bit bigger, see the instruction sheet of the order form for the actual dimensions). Originally, medallions were ordered on the same form as markers but there is now a separate form for ordering medallions. Use the correct form.



There is one big restriction printed right on the form's instructions, "Only for Veterans who died on or after November 1, 1990." There are a few more restrictions but they are all printed on the form's instruction page.

Again, the VA pays all costs including the shipping (probably by mail) to the applicant. From the instructions, "Appropriate affixing adhesives, hardware and instructions are provided with the medallion."

I suggest that you check with the cemetery before ordering. They might have some experience with these medallions and offer some suggestions and/or restrictions. Remember, it's the veteran's grave but it's their cemetery.

Download the PDF form www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-1330M.pdf the same as you would the form for a marker. Again, this is a complex and large form (3.2 MB) and may not completely download the first time. There are only two pages on this form but make sure that you get the second page with the blue tinted spaces.

As soon as you have a complete copy, save it on your computer as you would any other document.

Preliminary Steps

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/hmm/discharge_documents.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 Office. 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).

If your state or county has a Veteran's Affairs Office or something like that, they might also be able to help you in your search for the document you need to prove service.

There is another sort of last resort you can try. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't but it cannot work unless you try. Download an SF180 form which is another PDF form. This one has three pages: <http://www.archives.gov/research/order/standard-form-180.pdf>. Page two of the SF180 is full of blue tinted boxes. This is the part you will fill in and send to one of the addresses on page three.

As an aside, I tried, without success, to find something that would prove WWI service of a great uncle of mine. I finally filled out an SF180 and sent it in. Bingo! Within a couple of weeks I received a "Certificate of Service." It gave his name, service number, Social Security number, service and dates of enlistment and discharge. He now has a VA Marker on his grave.

This brings up something else. It is not directly stated on the VA Marker form or instructions but spousal information may be included on the marker (name, birth date and death date). That information goes in the "Remarks" box.

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 form. That's the PDF form you downloaded earlier.



Filling in the blanks (those blue tinted boxes)

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 or remove 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. When you have filled in all the blanks you can, print just that one page. That is the only one of the pages that needs to be sent.

As an alternative, you can print just the ‘fill in the blank’ page and fill in the blanks by hand. That is not a bad idea. Better yet would be to print out the entire form 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 just that page before closing the document.

Directions for filling in the form are included with what you downloaded (the PDF form). 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. Important: If you don’t know, don’t guess—leave it blank.

Make sure that everybody who needs to sign the form has signed the form before it is mailed. For VA Markers, two additional signatures are needed on the form: someone representing the cemetery and whomever is going to receive the marker when it is delivered. Make certain that the required documents (copy of the DD-214?) 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.



document you need.

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

If you are having trouble proving a veteran’s service, you might check with 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