

What Every Veteran Should Know and Do

This article contains two things that every veteran of the U. S. Armed Services should do. How long you served or where or when you served does not matter (although it might but you would already know about that if it did). If you received a DD-214, which is your “Report of Separation,” you are entitled to several services. Should you go to the Veteran’s Administration for anything, the first thing they will require you to produce is your DD-214.



Before 1950 the services had different separation forms but all these were replaced by the DD-214. If you completed your service before 1950 you will need to find what form was used and go with that. Here “DD-214” will mean any and all Separation Papers.

If your DD-214 or other discharge paper has been lost, stolen, misplaced or just can’t be found, go to this web site: <http://dd214.us/>. They have a lot of information about the DD-214 itself and how to locate and obtain a copy. But there is a better way.

[Recording your DD-214](#)

Here is the first thing to do, if you haven’t already. Take your original DD-214 down to your local County Recorder’s Office and ask them to record it. Every county in the U.S. does this and at no cost to the veteran! You might have to pay a nominal fee for extra copies but the first one is usually free.



Which DD-214 to record? Veterans who served on active duty more than once, probably (should have) received a DD-214 for each period of active service. It is the last one you received that you want to record. This should show your accumulated and total service. It should also have all your decorations and awards. If it doesn’t or something else is wrong, you need to get it corrected. Go to this web site to find out how to do that: <http://www.cufon.org/CRG/memo/186587.html>.

Potential problem! Anything recorded in the County Recorder’s Office is open to the public, mainly land deeds, etc. But Congress and most States have passed laws specifying that Veteran records are considered confidential and not open to the public. You or your next of kin are about the only ones who can obtain a copy of your DD-214. For a summary (47 pages?) of the various state’s laws, plus pertinent references to the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act, go to (too long an address to fit on one line): http://www.pria.us/files/public/Standards_Publications/Current/state_statutes_Military_Discharge.pdf.

If you are planning on being buried in any of the National Cemeteries, your heirs will need a copy of your DD-214. Just one more reason to have it recorded where they can always get a copy. But let’s go one step further and get it all together ahead of time.

[Form VA 40-1330](#)

This is the form your heirs will need to obtain a VA marker for your grave. 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. Be sure to “Save” and not “Run” so you will always have a copy and not need to download twice (or more). 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 quite a few blue tinted 'fill in the blanks' spaces. Make sure you received that page with those blue tinted spaces.



This form will probably be changed many, many times before your heirs will need it. In fact, a change is already in the works because of the addition of a Medallion by the VA. They may be obtained for any veteran whose grave is marked with a private, not a VA, marker. Go to <http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/hm/hmtype.asp> for more information about these new Medallions. But, you will need a copy of the Veteran's DD-214!

That brings us to the reason for downloading the VA 40-1330 form. In order to receive a VA grave marker, your heirs will need to submit this form or its current equivalent and a copy of your DD-214. But a lot of the information to fill out the form is unknown to them and they will have to go through your papers looking for that information. That is information you already know and don't have to look for. So, fill out the downloaded VA 40-1330 form now and save them the trouble. Plus, you get to indicate your preferences as to marker type and what to put on the marker ahead of time. That makes one less thing for your heirs to worry about.

Open the PDF file to page three, the page with all the blue shading. Fill in as much as you can but some things, such as your death date, you won't know so leave them blank. As you type the information into the blue shaded boxes, the shading goes away replaced by what you enter.

A couple of cautions you need to know about. It might pay to print the entire form before you start to fill it in. This will save you having to go back and forth from page three to the instructions and illustrations. Once you start to enter information, enter all you can and print that one page. When you close that program, all the information you entered will be lost and the blue shading returns! (There is an exception to this and that is to "Save As" with a different file name.)

[Final Assembly and Storage](#)

Do your heirs a favor and put a copy of your DD-214 and the filled out VA 40-1330 form together. These two items will be what they need to obtain a VA Grave Marker for you.



Also indicate that you do or do not want Military Honors at the grave site. Put this on a separate piece of paper along with any other instructions not covered in your Will. It is a good idea to keep these two items with your Will.

As a Veteran, you are entitled to Military Honors including a rifle squad for a Three Volley Salute and a Burial Flag to cover your casket. This Burial Flag will be folded and presented to your spouse or nearest relative present at the service.

Besides that, these three items will provide a lot of information that will be needed. Let someone know where these three items are. Perhaps you can store them in a safe deposit box that your heirs already have access too.



DD-214 + VA 40-1330 + Will →

