

# What Every Veteran Should Know and Do

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All things are subject to change including change itself. This information is no exception. Forms change, procedures change, web sites change, links change, etc. This is the most current information available at the time I posted this but things could have changed by now. Some things probably have! VA 40-10007 form is new!

This article contains two things that every veteran of the U. S. Armed Services should do. The first is to preserve your “Report of Separation” which is essential for obtaining any and all benefits from your military service. The second is to pre-order a Marker or Medallion from the Veterans Administration. Actually, just have the right form and fill in as much information as you need (except for your date of death!).

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 ever 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 prior planning provides a better way.



## Recording your DD-214

Here is the first thing to do if you haven’t already. Take your original DD-214 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 copy is usually free. No matter what happens to your original, they will always have a copy.



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 need 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.

If you are planning on being buried in any of the National Cemeteries, your heirs will need a copy of your DD-214 and, probably, your death certificate. 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. (There is more about burial at a National Cemetery at the end of this article.)

### [Form VA 40-1330](#)

This is the form your heirs will need to obtain a VA Marker for your grave. Even if you are planning to be buried in a National Cemetery, where your marker will be provided, it is a good idea to fill out this form anyway.

You can keep reading here about the forms necessary to obtain VA Markers and/or Memorials. But, go to [http://www.jaycwood.us/files/VA\\_Markers3.pdf](http://www.jaycwood.us/files/VA_Markers3.pdf) and obtain much more detail about filling out the forms and what to do with them. Here you will receive the essentials; there you will receive the details.

One of the first things to do is go to <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-1330.pdf> and download the application form and instructions. Be sure to save the form so you will always have a copy and not need to download twice (or more). Is a good idea for you to print a copy of the blank form right after you receive it and use that as a worksheet.

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 (and possibly a copy of your Death Certificate). 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.

If you already have a cemetery plot waiting for you, check with the cemetery as to what types of markers they accept. It may be your grave but it's their cemetery. Most cemeteries only accept flush with the ground markers and no uprights. Most, if not all, markers in the National Cemeteries are upright markers.

Open the PDF file on your computer and go 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 and is replaced by what you enter.

### [Form VA 40-1330M](#)

The VA has made available a Medallion, to be affixed directly to an existing grave marker, indicating that the person buried there was a veteran. They may be obtained for any veteran whose grave is marked with any marker that is not a VA marker. There is, however, one big restriction: "Only for Veterans who died on or after November 1, 1990." To order a Medallion requires a different form than to order a Marker.



Check with the cemetery where the veteran is buried and see if they have any restrictions about these medallions. While at the cemetery, look at the existing marker to determine how much room there is for the Medallion, then order the right size. They come in three sizes and the dimensions of each are shown on the order form.

Download this form from <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-1330M.pdf>. There are detailed instructions about completing the form and information about the Medallion itself.

### Final Assembly and Storage

Do your heirs a favor. 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.

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. Go to the Department of Veterans Affairs web site at [https://www.cem.va.gov/military\\_funeral\\_honors.asp](https://www.cem.va.gov/military_funeral_honors.asp) for full details.

Also indicate that you do or do not want Military Honors at your 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 three items with your Will.

Besides that, these three items (DD 214 + VA 40-1330 + Military Honors wishes) 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.



### Form VA 40-10007

This is about eligibility for burial in a National Cemetery. While re-writing and updating this article, I received my *VFW Magazine* for June/July 2017. On page 48, I found a most interesting article: "New VA Form Determines National Cemetery Eligibility."

If you have any doubts about your eligibility or even if you are only considering this option, you need to download, fill out and send in this form. Even if you have already decided to be buried in a National Cemetery, you should fill out and send in this form.

Download this form at: <https://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-10007.pdf>. This form contains one instruction page and one 'fill in the blank' page the same as the other two VA forms. Read about how to handle all of these forms in my "VA Markers" article (see above).

After receiving the filled out form and any supporting documents, "The VA will review applications and provide written notice of eligibility." That will certainly give you some piece of mind about your burial. It should also eliminate the need for your family to prove you are eligible.

A few things you should know about National Cemeteries. They operate on a 'first come, first served' basis. There are no reservations! Yes, spouses of eligible veterans may also be buried in a National Cemetery (fill out two VA 40-10007 forms).

When you receive your "Notice of Eligibility" from the VA, put it with the other forms and documents you are storing. Whoever makes arrangements for you after you are gone will certainly appreciate your efforts.