

INSCRIPTION/REPLACEMENT OF HEADSTONES AND MARKERS IN PRIVATE OR LOCAL GOVERNMENT CEMETERIES

1. PURPOSE/REASON FOR ISSUE: This notice clarifies National Cemetery Administration (NCA) policy about eligible inscription categories, which includes stringent language on spousal relationships and general conditions to replace Government-furnished headstones and markers in private or local government cemeteries (e.g., county or municipal). State Veteran Cemeteries are not included as local government cemeteries.

2. BACKGROUND: Under section 2306 of title 38 of the United States Code, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) may not provide a headstone or marker to mark the grave of the spouse of a Veteran interred in a private or local government cemetery. NCA and the VA Office of General Counsel have concluded that limiting inscription text to show spousal relationship on Government-furnished headstones and markers for Veterans interred in private or local government cemeteries will acknowledge the marital status of the Veteran without physically marking the grave of the spouse. Headstone and marker replacement requests should be processed in accordance with the guidelines of this Notice.

3. CHANGE TO POLICY/PROCEDURES:

a. **INSCRIPTIONS:** NCA will approve the following inscriptions on headstones or markers furnished at Government expense for Veterans in private or local government cemeteries:

(1) Mandatory inscriptions: Veteran's legal name, branch of service, year of birth and death.

(2) Optional inscriptions: Month and day of birth and death, highest rank attained, awards, war service, and emblem of belief.

(3) Additional inscriptions: If space is available and VA approves, additional inscriptions may include terms of endearment, nicknames, military and/or civilian credentials. Any additional inscription referring to the Veteran's spouse must be in the format "WIFE OF," "HUSBAND OF," or "SPOUSE OF [name of non-Veteran spouse]." Requests for inscription concerning any other relationship will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the Director, Memorial Programs Service.

b. REPLACEMENTS:

(1) NCA will process any request to replace an existing Government-furnished headstone or marker for a Veteran in private or local government cemeteries at Government expense, if the headstone or marker:

(a) Is unserviceable, damaged, illegible, or has been stolen or vandalized;

(b) Contains an error of fact that must be corrected, as defined in NCA Notice 2004-06, Headstone/Marker Replacement;

(c) Is the incorrect type or style for the decedent's era of service;

(d) Is rejected by the cemetery or family as the incorrect type or not the inscription that was requested—validated by review of the originally submitted VA Form 40-1330; or

(e) Lacks mandatory information (Veteran's legal name, branch of service, year of birth and death) for Veterans who died less than 50 years ago.

(2) Except as provided below, the inscription on any replacement will be "in-kind," that is, it will be the same inscription as on the original headstone or marker, and the same type of headstone or marker except to fulfill the requirement of 3b(1)(c).

(a) Exception 1: The original requestor of the headstone or marker may amend the inscription if the headstone or marker is being replaced for another acceptable reason under the replacement policy in 3b(1) or

(b) Exception 2: The original inscription included information about the spouse that was not compliant. NCA will not re-inscribe information regarding the Veteran's spouse that does not comply with 3a(3).

(3) Requests to replace a headstone or marker within a property that is eligible for or listed on the National Register of Historic Places may require NCA to conclude historic preservation consultation with state officials and other stakeholders per the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 as amended, prior to replacement.

(4) NCA will discontinue replacing Government-furnished headstones or markers to inscribe a spouse's date of birth and death on a Veteran's headstone or marker placed in a private or local government cemetery. In response to a request to replace a headstone or marker to complete a previously incomplete spousal inscription (i.e., lacking date of death) or to add a spousal inscription in blank or reserved space, NCA will advise the requestor that, because of the legal limitations, NCA may only inscribe spousal information as defined in paragraph 3a(3), and that NCA is reviewing possible ways to address these limitations. Until the legal limitation is changed, NCA will offer the requestor the following options:

(a) NCA may replace the headstone or marker with one that contains a compliant inscription (containing information about the spouse only as described in a(3) above);

(b) If the requestor is willing to delay replacement, NCA will advise if/when the legal limitation is amended to allow for more information to be inscribed about the non-Veteran spouse; or

(c) The family may inscribe the requested information at private expense.

4. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** NCA, Memorial Programs Service, 810 Vermont Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20420 is responsible for the contents of this notice.
5. **RESCISSION:** None
6. **EXPIRATION:** This notice will expire on July 31, 2016; however, the information contained within will remain in effect until incorporated into an NCA handbook/directive.

/s/
Ronald E. Walters
Interim Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs

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