

## ACCEPTANCE OF DONATIONS FEATURING THE FALLEN SOLDIER DISPLAY

**1. PURPOSE/REASON FOR ISSUE:** The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) is publishing this notice to clarify policies to accept donations of physical replicas and images of the fallen soldier display.

**2. BACKGROUND:** The military community recognizes the fallen soldier display, also referred to as a battlefield cross, as a way of showing honor and respect for a deceased Servicemember. The display, which typically features helmet, boots, dogtags, and rifle, has evolved over time from use as an actual temporary battlefield grave marker to its current use in memorial services at posts and forward bases where Servicemembers honor fallen colleagues while the service components prepare remains for dignified transfer to their final resting place.

NCA has noted increased interest in donations of the fallen soldier display; however, review and acceptance of offers to donate such displays has been inconsistent due to varying interpretation of existing policy. Under the current NCA Handbook 3160/1, Gifts and Donations Procedures at VA National Cemeteries (May 8, 2010), NCA does not accept donations of military equipment or implements of war, such as weapons, aircraft, or vehicles for display in the national cemeteries. Also, under the December 2007 Guidelines and Requirements for Review and Acceptance of Memorials in National Cemeteries ("2007 guidelines"), NCA does not accept monuments or commemorative works that feature actual or realistic replicas of ordnance.

NCA is updating and revising its gifts and donations policies, which will include provisions regarding the acceptance of offers to donate physical, three-dimensional replicas of the fallen soldier display and items containing images of the fallen soldier display. Until the revised policies are formally adopted, this notice establishes NCA policy applicable to all offers to donate three-dimensional replicas of the fallen soldier display and items that feature the image of the fallen soldier display.

### 3. CLARIFICATION OF POLICY:

a. Cemetery Directors may review and recommend whether to accept a donation that includes a physical replica or an image of the fallen soldier display using the guidelines and requirements identified in the 2007 guidelines for standardized memorial monuments and applying the following additional criteria:

i. Three-dimensional, physical replicas of the fallen soldier display may be no larger than the life-size version of the helmet, boots, dogtags, and rifle. See example of replica that is located in the administrative building entrance at Fort Custer National Cemetery;



ii. Standardized memorial monuments and commemorative works may feature the image of the fallen soldier display (i.e., an engraved or incised depiction). See examples of fallen soldier displays featured at Ohio Western Reserve National Cemetery (left) and engraved on the back of a monument at Port Hudson National Cemetery (right);



iii. Once a replica of a fallen soldier display is accepted, any subsequent display in the same cemetery must commemorate a different military era by using design elements (helmet, firearm, boots) that were or are commonly used in that era. This restriction does not apply to images used on a standardized memorial monument or commemorative work;

iv. A proposal for donation may include a recommended location identified for placement of the display. Physical replicas may not be placed permanently in burial sections or areas surrounding committal shelters. Cemetery Directors may recommend that physical replicas be placed in or around non-burial sections, such as the public

information center, administrative offices, flag pole displays, memorial walkways, and landscape features. Mobile replica displays intended for ceremonial use may be used in conjunction with committal or memorial services at the family's request or at commemorative events;

v. Replicas of the fallen soldier display must be made out of cut-stone or a durable metal (e.g., brass, cast-bronze, or cast-stainless steel) in its natural color for durability and ease of maintenance;

vi. The base for the display must be proportionate to the overall size of the display, should not exceed the display's width by more than 6 inches on any side, and should be no higher than 12 inches;

vii. Existing replicas may remain in place without regard to this notice.

b. District Executive Directors will review and approve or disapprove any donation proposal, to include the placement location, for a fallen soldier display at a VA national cemetery in accordance with 2007 standardized memorial monument guidelines and associated checklist procedures.

**4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** National Cemetery Administration, Office of Field Programs and Cemetery Operations, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20420, is responsible for the contents of this notice. Questions may be referred to Executive Director, Cemetery Operations.

**5. RESCISSION:** None.

**6. EXPIRATION:** This notice may be archived six months after issue date unless renewed for an additional six month time period. The content will remain in force until incorporated into an NCA directive or handbook.

/s/ Ronald E. Walters  
Principal Deputy Under Secretary  
for Memorial Affairs

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