

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS: COMMEMORATIVE URN AND PLAQUE



Figure 1. Sample Urn with fictitious name.

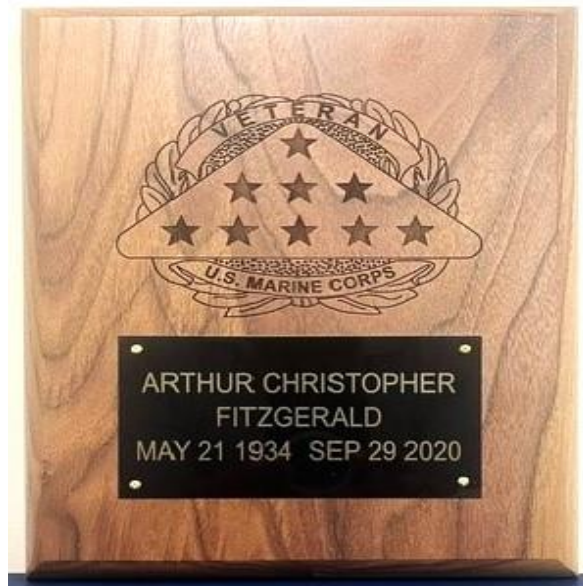


Figure 2. Sample Plaque with fictitious name.

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Q1. What are the commemorative plaque and commemorative urn benefits?

A1. The plaque and urn are two memorial items that commemorate a Veteran's service whose cremated remains have not been interred.¹ A "commemorative plaque" is designed to hang on a wall and a "commemorative urn" is used to hold the remains of a deceased cremated Veteran. Claimants may request either the plaque or the urn according to their preference. They are not entitled to both.

Q2. Please explain why Veterans commemorated with a plaque or urn are prohibited from being buried in VA national cemeteries or receiving a government headstone or marker or niche cover or medallion?

A2. The federal law² that authorizes VA to provide the plaque or urn benefit includes these prohibitions. Once VA furnishes a commemorative plaque or urn, the law prohibits VA from burying that Veteran in a VA national cemetery or providing a government headstone, marker, niche cover, or medallion for that Veteran in any cemetery.

Q3. My mother wants to hold onto the cremated remains of my Veteran father in her residence until she passes and then at the time of need, she wants to be buried in a VA national cemetery with him. For that reason, we have decided not to submit a claim for a commemorative plaque or urn. Are there other benefits that VA provides that would commemorate without triggering the prohibition against future burial in a VA national cemetery?

A3. Yes, VA can provide the following memorial benefits that would not affect future burial in a VA national cemetery.

Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) is an engraved, frameable paper certificate commemorating the service of a Veteran that bears the signature of the current President. An individual may order multiple PMCs for additional family members, and receipt of PMCs does not affect VA's ability to inter or memorialize a Veteran in anyway.

¹ Interment means the burial or entombment of casketed or cremated remains, including the placement of cremated remains in a columbarium niche. The regulation published on (date) 38 CFR 38.634 further indicates that interment anywhere would disqualify a Veteran from being commemorated with a plaque or urn.

² Section 2207 of Public Law 116-315, the "Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (codified in 38 U.S.C. § 2306(h))."

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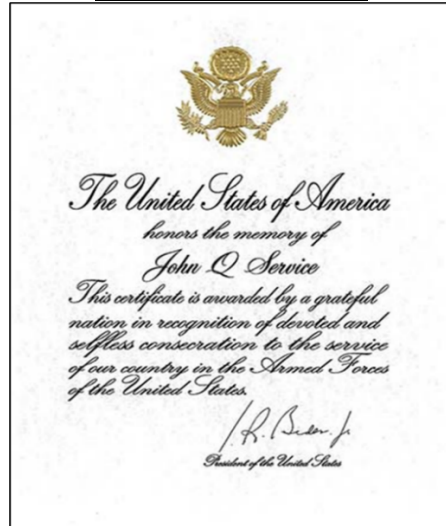


Figure 3. Presidential Memorial Certificate Sample

[Click here to learn more about Presidential Memorial Certificates](#)

[Burial Flag.](#) VA can provide a United States flag to drape on a casket (or coffin) or place with an urn in honor of the military service of a Veteran or Reservist.

[Click here to learn more about burial flags.](#)

Q4. Who is eligible for a plaque or urn?

A4. VA will provide a plaque or an urn to a qualified applicant to commemorate a deceased Veteran who has been cremated with no portion of the remains interred at any location. The Veteran must have been discharged under conditions other than dishonorable on or after April 6, 1917, and this also includes any Servicemember of the Armed Forces of the United States who dies on active duty whose remains have been cremated with no portion of the remains interred at any location.

Q5. What form do I need to fill out to get a plaque or urn instead of a headstone, marker, or medallion?

A5. Please complete and submit the VA Form 40-1330UP, *Claim for Commemorative Urn or Plaque for Veterans' Cremains Not Interred*. The form and supporting documents may be submitted by using Quick Submit at

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access.va.gov; mailed to NCA FP Evidence Intake Center, PO Box 5237, Janesville, WI 53547; or faxed to 1-800-455-7143.

- Q6. I am interested in receiving either the plaque or the urn for my Veteran loved one, but I want the option to bury the Veteran's cremated remains in a Veterans cemetery in the future. What options are there? Can I return the plaque or urn later and have the benefit of burial in a VA national cemetery restored?**

A6. Once a plaque or urn is furnished to commemorate a Veteran, VA is prohibited by law from interring the Veteran's cremated remains in a VA national cemetery or from furnishing a headstone, marker, or medallion for placement in any cemetery. The law does not provide a method to restore these benefits. Many Veterans and family members consider the benefits forfeited to be of significant monetary and symbolic value. That is why this decision is so important.

The law does not prohibit burial in a state or tribal Veterans cemetery or in any other cemetery. The owners/operators of those cemeteries will decide whether they will allow interment and under what conditions. Keep in mind, however, that many of these owner/operators usually rely on VA to provide a government headstone or marker to mark the grave of the Veteran at no cost. Since VA will not provide one, there may be additional costs that the owner/operator will charge to mark the grave.

- Q7. Can the spouse still be buried in a national, state Veterans' or tribal cemetery if a plaque or urn is provided for the Veteran?**

A7. Yes. The spouse (and/or dependent child) may still be interred in a VA national cemetery even if the Veteran is prohibited from burial and VA would mark the grave of the spouse (or dependent child.)

Caution: However, a spouse (or dependent child) would be prevented from being interred if the Veteran's remains and the spouse's cremated remains are commingled. This would prevent VA from interring the spouse also.

- Q8. I am the brother of a deceased Veteran and the cremated remains were given to my aunt. How can I learn whether a plaque or urn has already been provided to commemorate my Veteran brother?**

A8. To see if VA has already provided a plaque or urn to commemorate a certain Veteran, please check the Nationwide Gravesite Locator at <https://www.cem.va.gov/nationwide-gravesite-locator/> and select "Urn/Plaque Benefits" from the Burial Locations drop down menu. You may also call the Applicant Assistance Unit at 1-800-697-6947.

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Q9. My great-grandfather is memorialized overseas at an American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC) cemetery. May I have a plaque for him?

A9. If the remains are cremated and not interred, VA may be able to furnish a commemorative plaque for a Veteran memorialized on the Tablet of the Missing.

Q10. We received a government marker for the Veteran after we interred the ashes, but also kept some ashes at home. Can an urn be provided for the ashes?

A10. No. This Veteran cannot be commemorated by a plaque or urn because the Veteran is already interred.

Q11. The Veteran's cremated remains have been split up among the family. Can each family member receive a plaque or an urn?

A11. No. VA is only authorized to furnish one commemoration product per Veteran, either the plaque or the urn. Additionally, the claimant for a plaque or an urn must certify that they are in possession of the entirety of the remains.

Q12. Can we get a plaque or urn to remember a non-Veteran spouse or dependent?

A12. No. VA is only authorized to furnish a plaque or urn to commemorate an eligible deceased Veteran or Servicemember whose cremated remains are not interred.

Q13. Can I add more information to the plaque or urn, such as inscribing additional text or attaching items to it?

A13. Unlike other memorial items that VA provides, once VA provides the plaque or urn, it becomes the applicant's private property and there are no restrictions from altering it.

Q14. The plaque or urn was damaged when I received it. How do I get a replacement?

A14. If your plaque or urn was damaged during shipping or contains a manufacturing deficiency or inscription error, you may request a replacement by notifying our Applicant Assistance Unit at 1-800-697-6947 and following the return instructions enclosed in the package.

Q15. I am a funeral home director and I help families inter their Veterans in a private cemetery and arrange for VA to provide a headstone. As part of my customer service to the families I serve, I like to explain their options for interment and marking the gravesite and the costs involved with the private cemetery. If they received a plaque or an urn, that will affect their options

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and possibly lead to more costs. How can I find out whether VA provided a plaque or urn to commemorate the Veteran?

A15. To see if a plaque or urn has already been provided, please check the Nationwide Gravesite Locator at <https://www.cem.va.gov/nationwide-gravesite-locator/> and select "Urn/Plaque Benefits" from the Burial Locations drop down menu. The Urn Plaque Benefits Locator will be updated daily. You may also call the Applicant Assistance Unit at 1-800-697-6947.

Q16. VA provides certain monetary burial benefits and plot allowance payments for the interment of certain deceased Veterans. Will VA provide these burial and plot allowance benefit payments for Veterans for whom VA has furnished a plaque or an urn?

A16. If eligible, VA will provide monetary burial benefits and plot allowance payments for whom VA has furnished with a plaque or urn.

Q17. Can a Veteran for whom VA has furnished a commemorative plaque or urn be interred at Arlington National Cemetery?

A17. Arlington National Cemetery is administered by the Department of the Army. The Office of Army Cemeteries has informed VA that Veterans for whom VA has furnished a commemorative plaque or urn will be prohibited from interment at Arlington National Cemetery.

Q18. I am a Veterans Service Officer, and I am assisting a local coroner's office with the remains of an indigent Veteran. Can I apply for a plaque or urn since the Veteran has no family claiming the remains?

A18. An applicant for a commemorative plaque or urn must be a member of the Veteran's family, which includes the Veteran's spouse or individual who was in a legal union as defined in 38 CFR § 3.1702(b)(1)(ii) of this chapter with the Veteran; a child, parent, or sibling of the veteran, whether biological, adopted, or step relation; and any lineal or collateral descendant of the Veteran.