In honor of the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, this is the ninth in a series of articles about records at the National Archives and Records Administration that are useful in researching the war and its participants.

Articles in two previous issues of NGS Magazine described the design of headstones provided for the graves of US military veterans as well as the records generated by requests for those headstones from 1879 to 1924.

This article will discuss records for headstones requested from 1925 to 1985 for veterans buried in nonfederal cemeteries, often called “private cemeteries,” which includes those maintained by a city, village, township, church, or family. Earlier records also include requests for headstones at selected federal cemeteries, including National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Headstone applications from 1879 to June 1970 are part of Record Group (RG) 92, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General (OQMG), while those for July 1970 and later years are part of RG 15, Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). Records about a veteran’s headstone are filed according to the date of the application, not the veteran’s date of death.

Headstone application form
The Quartermaster General adopted the convenient 8” by 5” card OQMG Form 623, Application for Headstone, on 24 September 1923. The form’s title was changed to Application for Headstone or Marker in July 1940. Although design and content changes were made over the years, the same basic form continued in service through the mid-1980s or later. (Today’s form, VA Form 40-1330, online at http://www.va.gov/vaforms/va/pdf/VA40-1330.pdf, is a full-size sheet of paper accompanied by three pages of instructions and information.)

Federal government forms are identified by form number, and the Application for Headstone or Marker is no exception. Form 623 was changed to QMC Form 626 in 1952, then...
changed to DA Form 1815, then changed to DD Form 1330 in 1960, and then VA Form 40-1330 by January 1974.

The front side of Form 623 normally contained the complete application. Depending on the version of the form, the back side was blank, had instructions for filing out the form, or provided a space for the cemetery official to sign the form. The back also provided space for one or more file stamp markings that noted the dates the application was received, handled, or acted upon.

Form 623 (1923 edition) included the following information about each veteran: name, rank, company, regiment, and division (for “World War” veterans); date of death; and the name of the cemetery and the city and state in which it was located. The applicant provided his address, and signed the application acknowledging that the application was for a veteran’s unmarked grave, and that it was “understood the stone will be furnished and delivered at the railroad station or steamboat landing above indicated, at Government expense, freight prepaid, and agreed it will be promptly removed and set up at private expense.” When bronze markers were added as a choice on 1 July 1940, they were shipped by parcel post. References to railroad stations and steamboat landings were eliminated beginning with the 15 March 1945 form.

On some versions of the form, the person to whom the headstone was to be shipped (“consignee”) provided an address and signed the application as acknowledgment that he/she agreed “to accept the headstone at above destination, freight prepaid, and properly place same on decedent’s grave.” The consignee’s name was sometimes typed instead of signed. Beginning with the 1 July 1942 edition, the form usually required the signature of a cemetery official acknowledging the stone or marker would be permitted at the grave, because some cemeteries no longer accepted upright stones and would only allow flat stones or markers.

In a box in a corner of the form, the OQMG’s Cemeterial Division recorded action taken on the application, such as the date of verification of military service by the Office of the Adjutant General (AG); date and place from which the stone was ordered; bill of lading number; and date of shipment to the recipient. These items were not always filled in.
Certain modifications to the Application for Headstone or Marker resulted in significant design changes to headstones that were discussed in a previous article. For example, beginning with the 1923 edition of the form, date of death became a standard headstone feature, while the date of birth became a standard feature beginning with the 1944 edition of the form. Beginning with the 1925 edition, the applicant was permitted to choose a Christian, Hebrew, or no religious symbol. Beginning about 1974, additional religious symbols were authorized.

Other modifications to the form allowed choice of materials. For example, the choice of upright or flat stone was added in 1937, and the option for a bronze marker given from 1940 to 1942 and from 1945 to the present. The choice of marble or granite stones was added in 1940. Flat slate became an option by 1980.

Other changes made to the Application for Headstone or Marker help researchers identify additional records about the veteran. For example, dates of enlistment and discharge were added to the form in 1931, the pension number in 1937, the army serial number in 1939, and the Social Security Number in 1974. The 1974 form was the only version that asked whether the veteran died on active duty, in reserve status, or was retired. The relationship of the applicant to the veteran was added in 1959.

The QMG wanted the veteran’s name and unit information on the gravestone to be correct. Information provided by the veteran’s family or other applicant was frequently incomplete or wrong. Therefore, name, date, and other corrections and additional information supplied by either the AG or the Navy Department were marked on the application usually in red or orange pencil. When the headstone was inscribed, the corrected information was used.

**Online records**

1925–63. Headstone applications for these years are most easily accessed in the Ancestry.com database called “Headstone Applications for Military Veterans, 1925–1963.” Applications submitted between 1925 and 1949 are online twice. Black-and-white images were scanned from National Archives Microfilm Publications M1916, Applications for Headstones for U.S. Military Veterans, 1925–1941 (134 rolls) and M2113, Applications for Headstones for U.S. Military Veterans, 1941–1949 (278 rolls), while color images were scanned from the original paper records. While most applications are for men who died during those years, there are also many who died before 1925, including Union and Confederate Civil War veterans, and a few Revolutionary War soldiers.

The QMG didn’t keep all these applications in one gigantic file. Instead, they were stored by various time segments, then alphabetically by name. The time segments were 1925–41, 1941–49, 1950–51, 1951–54, 1954–56, 1956–57, Fiscal Year (FY) 1959, FY 1960, FY 1961, FY 1962, and FY 1963. Of course there are nuances and exceptions. During the 1925–41 and 1941–49 time segments, the QMG filed headstone applications for Native Americans in a section called “Indian Scouts” (in the middle of “I” surnames), and then alphabetically by name. Each segment from 1956 and later has a section of applications from previous fiscal years that did not get filed with those for the fiscal year in which the application was submitted.
Records that are not online
1915–39. As mentioned in the previous article in this “headstone” series, for about a quarter century the QMG kept “correspondence” records separate from “application” records discussed above. Thus, there are 5,406 boxes of Correspondence, Reports, Telegrams, Applications, and Other Papers Relating to Burials of Service Personnel (“Burial Case Files”), 1915–1939 (NM-81, Series 1942, ARC ID 595318).

Even if there is an application in the Ancestry.com database, “Headstone Applications for Military Veterans, 1925–1963,” there may also be additional records in the 1915–39 “Burial Case Files” series for applications submitted during those years. For example, Clarence Fourtney Funk’s 1938 headstone application, reproduced in color and black-and-white in the online “Headstone Applications for Military Veterans, 1925–1963,” database, is not the only record about that headstone. Funk has his own Burial Case File that contains a second (less annotated) copy of the headstone application as well as correspondence between the QMG and the Navy Department about whether Funk’s middle name should be spelled Fortney or Fourtney (it appeared both ways in Navy records), and a Verification Slip sent to Funk’s son on which he corrected it to Fourtney, which is how it was carved on the headstone. Interestingly, the name was originally submitted as Fortney on the headstone application.

Headstone applications submitted from July 1963 through September 1985, as well as the 1915–1939 Burial Case Files are in the custody of the National Archives, but are not online. For more information, contact National Archives at St. Louis (RL-SL), 9700 Page Avenue, St. Louis, MO, 63132-5100, or e-mail mpr.center@nara.gov.

Headstone applications for July 1963 through June 1970 are part of RG 92, Records of the OQMG, and are arranged by federal fiscal year, then alphabetically by name. Applications are filed in the fiscal year during which they were submitted, not the year of death. Thus, it is important to understand that the federal fiscal year began in July and ended the next June: FY 1964 (July 1963–June 1964), FY 1965 (July 1964–June 1965), FY 1966 (July 1965–June 1966), FY 1967 (July 1966–June 1967), FY 1968 (July 1967–June 1968), FY 1969 (July 1968–June 1969), and FY 1970 (July 1969–June 1970). However, each of those fiscal years has a box at the end (after the letter Z) that says “Applications Prior to F.Y. [current year],” so these are additional boxes to check if an application cannot be found in the main alphabetical sequence. (Applications for Headstones, 1925–70, ARC Identifier 596118).

In 1973, Congress decided that the task of providing headstones for veterans should be
transferred from military to civilian control. This change means that newer records are part of RG 15, Records of the DVA, which also inherited applications dating back to 1970.


Applications submitted from October 1985 to the present remain in the custody of the DVA.

Conclusion
Headstones provided by the federal government for US military veterans honor the memory of veterans and the service they gave in defense of our freedom. Headstone application records help genealogists identify, honor, and remember the lives and service of their kin.


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